

PERSONAL HISTORIES OF THE SECOND WAVE OF FEMINISM

SUMMARISED FROM INTERVIEWS BY
VIV HONEYBOURNE AND ILONA
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Volumes One and Two



FEMINIST ARCHIVE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**FOREWORD BY THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
WORKERS**

ILONA SINGER AND VIV HONEYBOURNE

The Oral History Project has been a fantastic opportunity to explore feminist activism from the 1970's onwards from the unique perspectives of women who were involved. We each conducted ten in depth qualitative interviews which were recorded (the minidisks will be kept at the archive as vital pieces of history themselves) and written up as an oral history. We used the open-ended questions (listed as an appendix), so as to let the women speak for themselves and not to pre-suppose any particular type of answer. We tried to involve our interviewees as much as possible in every stage of the research process. Many interviewees chose to review and amend the final write-ups and we were happy to let them do this so that they could have control over how they wished to be represented. The use of a snowball sampling method and the fact that our interviewees were willing volunteers means that these histories (herstories) are not meant to be representative in a strictly scientific sense. Some women were more publicly active in the period than others, but all our of interviewees had important stories to tell and vital reflections on the period. The oral histories have been included in alphabetical order. They are of differing lengths because some women spoke for longer than others and we felt that to strive excessively to limit their words would be imposing an artificial limit on their account of their own lives .

In general our interviewees really opened up to us and the resulting oral histories are highly autobiographical. Their stories of continually fighting discrimination in all its forms make compelling reading lest we should forget just how much was achieved in this critical period. Although each woman's involvement was different and each woman's history unique and personal, there was also a sense in which they were spokeswomen for that time and that their own subjective experiences propelled them into tackling both the public and private obstacles in every woman's way. The maxim of 1970s feminism 'the personal is political' seems particularly appropriate to these women who fought so hard for issues such as domestic violence, sexuality, reproductive rights, employment rights, women's legal rights etc. to be recognised. They struggled so that discrimination could be identified and tackled in all areas of women's lives. Many women spoke of sisterhood and the incredible energy of the time. Some also spoke of extremist rhetoric and bitter divisions. Certainly for our interviewees (as for many women) it was an incredible and unique time that has had a huge impact on the experiences and opportunities that women now have.

We are aware that some of the women who were very involved with feminist activity in Bristol in the post 1970 period are sadly no longer with us. The following list is not exhaustive or representative but is some of the names of sisters who were mentioned to us as having been involved but have now passed away. It seems appropriate and respectful to remember them here; Jacky Thrupp, Rosie Brennan, Beverley Skinner,

Jose Satterthwaite, and Janet Parham. The fact that their stories may be now be lost forever is a testament to the urgency and importance of this project.

We would like to thank all our interviewees, many of whom welcomed us into their homes, talked unreservedly about their lives and experiences, donated artefacts and material to the Archive, provided details of other contacts and went to great efforts to help us to make this project a success. We would like to thank Ellen Malos for acting as a useful initial contact, to Kirsty Reid for sharing thoughts about oral history and feminist research, and most of all to Jane Hargreaves (archive manager) for her unwavering support. We generally found it compelling and empowering to meet such extraordinary women. We are very grateful that they have shared with us these deeply personal accounts and we believe that they feel as we do that this vital period in history should be preserved through the words of the women who helped to shape it.

ELIZABETH BIRD



Elizabeth is a senior lecturer (Continuing Education) in the Department of Drama at the University of Bristol. Her main feminist involvements have been: organising women's studies courses and women returners' courses, trade union campaigns for equal opportunities within university employment, abortion and contraception campaigns, childcare campaigns, the Bristol Women's Centre, Women's Aid, Half the Sky, consciousness-raising groups and the Women's Caucus of the British Sociological Association.

Elizabeth grew up in a middle class household in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Her family had a tradition of educating women and she attended a girls' independent church high school with a good academic reputation. Her father died when she was twelve and as her mother was then a widow, issues of women's financial status became very important to them. Elizabeth remembers her mother as being very involved in the Women's Institute and campaigning actively against the VAT imposed on sanitary products. She also remembers her mother being involved in a campaign against the use of turnstiles in public lavatories as these were particularly difficult for pregnant women to pass through. Elizabeth acknowledges that having this kind of background did accustom her to thinking about issues that affect women. When she went to study at a women's college at Oxford University at age eighteen, she was already pre-disposed towards feminist ideas. In 1969 she went to Cornell University in the USA as a graduate student and became involved in the women's movement which was just starting up there. She remembers being involved in campaigns regarding access to contraception and abortion as those were particularly important issues at the time.

From 1971-6 Elizabeth lived in Glasgow where she became involved in 'Women in Action' which was a feminist campaigning organisation. Again a major focus was contraception and abortion campaigns. At this time she also became involved in Women's Aid. In 1974 she joined the Extra-mural Studies department at Glasgow University. She became part of a campaign to have a campus nursery and found there to be a lot of prejudice about the age at which children should be allowed to be entrusted to outside carers. The nursery was promised by the university authorities but was not established until much later. She also tried to launch several 'women's

studies' courses but they were not successful due to a lack of interest. When she had first moved to Bristol in 1976 she left her partner behind in Scotland for five years, although they still continued to have a relationship. This gave her a great deal of independence and free time and she was able to get involved in the Women's Centre. She went to meetings, helped to write the newsletter and staffed the rota at drop-ins. She remembers using the pregnancy testing service at the Women's Centre when she found out she was pregnant with her son (on International Women's Day!) in 1981. She also became involved in university politics and the campaigns around the Bristol campus nursery. Again she found that there was a lot of prejudice around the issue of using nurseries for young babies, rather than just toddlers and she had to contend with many 'experts' who felt that a woman's 'place' was at home with her children. She joined a consciousness-raising group which met at her flat for several years. She also became involved in the compiling of *Half the Sky* (1979) which was an important women's studies 'reader'.

From 1976 onwards, Elizabeth took over the running of women's studies courses in the Extra-mural Studies department at Bristol. She also helped to expand the courses available in this area and organise other ones throughout the South West. Many of the women who attended the women's studies courses were already educated but found themselves unable to work due to childcare commitments. Many of them had recently moved from London and had fairly progressive interests and ideals. Lots of the courses formed into campaigning groups which focused on issues like women and the media, consciousness-raising or set up refuges. In the 1980's some of the women's courses began to focus around issues of personal development and growth, for example assertiveness or co-counselling skills. As many of the women on the courses decided to return to work after studying Elizabeth also helped set up 'women returners' courses which are still popular today. She regards these courses as her most important feminist achievement. Elizabeth believes that they are very valuable in helping to promote women's skills and confidence to enable them the return to the job market. She points out that many of the women who have undertaken such courses have gone on to be very successful, often in academia and their research has often uncovered very important findings in relation to gender. She is still regularly approached by women who tell her that the courses she has organised have "changed their lives", and she feels such opportunities for women to have a voice and to have their needs recognised are vital.

In terms of more general achievements in the post 1970 period, Elizabeth cites the right to free legal abortion and contraception as being; "the most important issue in terms of women's lives and control over their lives". She feels that education has been transformed e.g. there are now more female than male undergraduates and the issue of girls 'failing' at school has been totally reversed. She feels this is partly due to changes in girls' ambitions and that they are generally becoming; "... more confident and can see the need for economic and financial independence." She also feels that the availability of childcare, especially for babies has been a major achievement of the WLM. Elizabeth believes that women have become freer in the post 1970 period, to try out different forms of relationships e.g. not getting married, having children outside marriage, and not to be as stigmatised by these choices. She also feels that much of the academic and social research that has been done on gender issues has been very important due to its impact on policy and potential for raising awareness generally. She is positive about the feelings of sisterhood that she has

experienced with other women in the movement but points out that full equality is still a long way off in terms of e.g. financial equality, how women are treated after divorce/separation, and the benefits system. She does however regard the 'second wave' period as one so momentous that "...it's very difficult now for people to realise just how different things were back in the 1960's and the enormous transformations made in women's lives. A lot of that was due to direct activism."

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

SARAH BRAUN



Sarah is an artist who has been a graphic designer, an illustrator and most recently a textile artist. Her main feminist involvements have been: consciousness-raising and discussion groups, marches and demonstrations, child care campaigns, socialist women's group, *Half the Sky*, pregnancy testing and staffing the rota at the Women's Centre.

Sarah's maternal grandmother was a suffragette, although she describes her as being a 'weekend suffragette' due to family commitments. Sarah has an early memory of being taken to see the statue of Emmeline Pankhurst near the Houses of Parliament and being told about the women's suffrage movement. She feels that she grew up with a sense of women being 'embattled', although her mother and grandmother were strong characters. The women in her family talked often of 'the island' which was a mythical feminist utopia with no men present. Hence Sarah feels that feminism was a strong feature of her upbringing: "In a sense I was born to be a feminist, it was all there in my background so when feminism emerged then it seemed to be waiting for me." At the age of fifteen Sarah discovered that her gender had been a familial disappointment and this left her feeling fairly insecure. At boarding school she first encountered sexism from a woodwork/metalwork teacher who belittled and ignored the girls whilst encouraging and praising the boys.

In 1971 Sarah was married with a baby and a toddler and she went to work for a small printing business in Bristol. Here she encountered Betty Underwood who lent her *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, and told her about the feminist movement in Bristol. For Sarah, "talking to Betty was a revelation. All the things I had felt vaguely uneasy about made sense and the fact that there were other women talking about these things seemed incredible." She started going to feminist discussion groups which she initially found a bit off-putting, until she met Ellen Malos. Ellen invited her to a national feminist conference and she later attended one in Bristol which she found inspiring and exciting. She felt that the conferences and meetings of this time were full of energy and embodied the sense that things could be different. She went to a national women's march in London and for the first time her husband had to change the baby's shitty nappy which she regards as her own "big feminist step forward!".

Child care campaigns became a focus for women's action and one that Sarah felt very strongly about. The discussion group which met at her house identified it as a major priority for the women's movement. Sarah became involved with the Bristol Council for Voluntary Service which campaigned for and set up childcare groups. She was also on the management committee of BAND (Bristol Association for Neighbourhood Daycare) which organised 'out of school clubs' in the Bristol area. One of her sons worked for one of these groups during university vacations. She was also the graphic designer for a pioneering handbook on this topic entitled *Out of School* edited by Jenny Hoadley and Sonia Jackson. Out of school childcare is now a nationwide area of activity. Sarah also joined a socialist women's group and also became involved in the Women's Centre in Bristol (which at this time was in the basement of Ellen's house!). Sarah remembers being partly responsible for the arrival of the first woman fleeing a violent relationship, later there were many more women sleeping on the floor of the Women's Centre as they had nowhere else to go. She helped to administer the pregnancy testing service at the Women's Centre for some time. This service was important because otherwise women would have to go to their GP to establish whether they were pregnant and they would often encounter hostility or old-fashioned attitudes from the medical profession.

Sarah regards the consciousness-raising group she joined as being particularly important. The meetings could be challenging as women were encouraged to talk about topics that were personal to them, but she feels this was important in helping people to understand certain aspects of other women's lives, especially of women who had a different kind of background etc... She regards the CR group as being: "The most important experience of my life [at that time] for my own personal growth because of the way it just took me by the neck and shook me." Some of the women in her CR group went on to be part of the collective that compiled the book *Half the Sky*, an important early women's studies text for which Sarah did the illustrations. Her husband Ted joined a men's group which was some kind of CR group. She found this quite funny and regarded it as an attempt by men to adjust to all the changes that women were making: "For a lot of men, living with women going through rapid change was a very difficult business. A lot of people split up then and we had expectations of men that were perhaps unrealistic." She feels lucky that she was: "...married to a man who could accommodate my changes, and they were huge ones." She regards this time as one of great advancement both for herself and for women generally.

However, Sarah was critical of some of the prevailing orthodoxies of the time, e.g. the idea that to be a 'true' feminist you couldn't wear make-up or had to wear trousers and preferably dungarees! She also felt that at times there was too much focus on negativity and not enough about the benefits of sisterhood or the enjoyable and creative things that were done together. She views the women's theatre group and women's art group as being positive creative accomplishments of this time. Although she had no belief/interest in the idea of the mother goddess and for this reason did not join the women's art group which she felt, tended to revolve around this concept. She also believes that the lack of formal structure in some of the groups and meetings made them rather undemocratic and inefficient. She remembers the excitement generated by being involved in campaigns and events but also remembers the conflict, particularly with the Wages for Housework consortium which she describes as being: "... opportunistic and parasitic on the women's movement." Sarah is adamant that

this group did a great deal of damage to the women's movement generally and that they were partly responsible for the break up of the women's peace camp at Greenham Common. She feels that conflict within different factions of the movement was often badly managed: due to a general lack of ground rules. She now feels that conflict became very divisive and sometimes held the movement back. She stopped being as involved in women's campaigns from the mid 1980's when she encountered a strong and hostile political lesbian presence at the Women's Centre. Sarah remembers being told by one woman that she was a traitor and had no right to be in the centre after she disclosed that she was married with two sons. This left her feeling angry and excluded, although she still kept up with the friends that she had made through her involvement, and still sees many of them regularly.

In terms of her own personal development, a pivotal incident occurred when one of her sons told her that she was being sexist against boys when she refused to tell him something that she would tell a female child. She describes it thus: "It was an important lesson to me to realise that the only way that men would grasp what women's lives were about was if you talked to them in the way that you would talk to daughters." As a result her sons both seem to understand the tenets of feminism on an intellectual level but she sometimes feels that they are still emotionally quite sexist. Sarah feels that she may have 'failed' in this respect although she concedes that women and girls can be equally sexist. She believes that the achievements of feminism have been such that young women today often have little understanding of the gains that have been made, for example what life was like before the 'pill' or legalised abortion. She feels things have improved with regard to child care and also the fact that mothers can have paid jobs. She points out that housework (especially cooking) seems to be more equally divided between the sexes. She feels that the fact that women are now taxed separately from a male partner (and can apply for loans and mortgages, etc., in their own name) is a very significant step towards equality. She also cites the refuge movement as being a major achievement. She believes there has been a general raising of consciousness in society regarding women's position but is fearful that some of this could lead to a backlash and some gains could be reversed. She feels that sexism is still a major problem in society and that there are still some very rigid ideas about women's appropriate 'place' which can restrict their opportunities. Sarah feels that matters of employment and equal pay are example of this and areas where there is still much progress to be made.

Sarah has used her own experience of being on marches and trying to carry heavy unwieldy banners to help her design and make lighter ones which are more practical for women to carry. She feels that the women's movement showed her that she could do different things with her life and that her career need not move in a strictly linear fashion, instead she could try different things according to her own interests and experiences. Thus she has been self employed for the last thirty years which has allowed her more freedom to develop as a person and as a feminist. In terms of her own involvement Sarah is sometimes regretful that family and career commitments meant that she was not always as involved as she might have been. For instance she cared deeply about what was going on at Greenham but wasn't able to camp there. She concludes that like her grandmother the 'weekend' suffragette, she was perhaps "... a 'part-time' feminist, but it still runs very thick in my veins."

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

JILL BROWN



Jill Brown currently works as a psychotherapist. Her main feminist involvements have been: consciousness-raising groups, equal pay campaigns, sexuality campaigns, National Women's Liberation conferences.

Jill describes her family background as being a left-wing radical one. Her parents were communists and she feels she was brought up in quite a middle class home. She went to study at Warwick University and later trained as a social worker. She worked mostly in the voluntary sector before re - training as a psychotherapist. Jill feels that she was initially drawn to political activity because of her background. She first became interested in feminism in 1971, when at university she was taught by Germaine Greer who she describes as inspirational as a teacher and as an activist. Around this time Jill started going to feminist meetings and found this very enriching: "I think it really gave me a context to make something of my life, experience and feelings that I hadn't been able to make much sense of before... I began to understand what being female in society was about." For Jill, the issue of being female was crucial to any understanding of society and oneself. Jill moved to Bristol in 1975 where she became involved in a variety of feminist campaigns and activities. She was involved in helping to run the Women's Centre both on a practical level, but also through organising activities and events. She took part in National Women's Liberation conferences and remembers being occupied most nights of the week with meetings, discussions and events. She regards the consciousness-raising groups as particularly important and stresses how well organised they were in Bristol with a good level of continuity in that the same women would meet together for years. She describes them thus: "We would tell our stories, always from the point of view of being female. It was very therapeutic and supportive, as if it were the base of the movement."

Jill regards this time (i.e. post 1970) as being a very vibrant and thriving one for the feminist movement(s). She feels there was a general raising of consciousness at this time which led to issues of women's oppression being discussed and taken more seriously with the realisation that: "...things which in the past might have been treated as individual inadequacies were actually about the way that women were viewed and discriminated against in society." She regards this as a very important psychological development. Jill cites the refuge movement, the academic work on domestic violence, the changing attitudes of police, and improved access to contraception, abortion and reproductive technologies as being particular achievements of this

period. She feels that provision for women escaping domestic violence has become largely part of the establishment now and this reflects the fact that the issue is generally being taken more seriously, although there is obviously more to be done. Jill reflects on the fact that some early tenets of 'second wave feminism' embodied a rather naïve view of power relations (i.e. the idea that men were necessarily the enemy). But she acknowledges this as an important developmental stage: "It was terribly important to identify, know and describe patriarchal thinking and oppressive behaviour and to say 'no' to all kinds of things that men were perpetuating, but I don't think that's enough. I think power relations are much more complicated than men are this and women are that. I think they are terribly complicated and that's why these issues go on and we don't solve them, certainly not by seeing men as the enemy." She also feels that divisions between women were often not handled particularly well at this time. Although sisterhood was seen as very important, issues of class, race and sexuality were not always managed well which lead to some painful conflicts within the women's movement: "It was like we always wanted to find the enemy. If it wasn't men it was heterosexual women who were accused of sleeping with the enemy." She remembers the conflict with the Wages for Housework consortium as being particularly vitriolic at times.

It is in thinking about her daughter (aged 19) that Jill is able to concretise some of the input that feminism of that period has had on women of today. She feels that her daughter has benefitted from things like the girls' workshops which were set up to teach girls traditionally 'male' skills, e.g. carpentry, working with the hands generally and understanding how things work. Jill is happy that her daughter is very confident, which may be partly to do with the influence of feminism. She feels that young women of today seem generally more confident in themselves as women and this may be part of an unacknowledged debt to the achievements of feminism. Jill worries that boy children of feminists may have had a difficult time due to being prevented from expressing natural aggression, unlike girl children who may have been encouraged in this. She feels that this kind of upbringing may have been damaging to boys as individuals. Jill feels that there is clearly still work to be done in areas like rape, domestic violence, equal pay etc... She points out that there is still a 'glass ceiling' which restricts women's opportunities for advancement but at least it is talked about now and not generally justified in terms of women's 'inferiority'. She believes there may always be a struggle or conflict between genders, but the WLM was very important in challenging assumptions about female 'inferiority' and male 'superiority'. This challenge was crucial then as it still is now. She also believes there has been an important change in consciousness in that feminism has highlighted the possibilities of choice for many more women and that it has helped to sever the link between a person's gender and their abilities and worth as a person.

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

LESLIE CAMPBELL



Leslie is a counsellor who specialises in working with young men. Her main feminist involvements have been: consciousness-raising groups, Bristol One Parent Project, Women's Aid, Bristol City Council Women's Committee, representing women in various academic institutions and Reclaim the Night marches.

She was born in 1951 and had an Irish, Catholic upbringing on a council estate on the outskirts of Bristol. She remembers her religious upbringing isolating her as a child because most of the local people seemed to be Protestants and Leslie went to a different church and different school from the people around her. She was the third child out of four and felt that she was on her own for a lot of the time when young, although she appreciated the freedom that she was given. Religion had a dominant influence on her early life and that of her parents, although she didn't share their idea of God; "Their God was of fire and brimstone, a really horrible, vengeful, punitive being. I could never understand it." She was also very aware of the class structure from an early age. The church her family attended had very rigid seating arrangements whereby the middle class people sat on one side and the working class sat on the other side. In a rebellious phase she sat on the 'wrong' side (i.e. the middle class bit) and was surprised at how uncomfortable she felt with this. Leslie remembers her father as a quiet man who was often absent due to being a construction worker. She was very aware of gender divisions from an early age; "for boys it was always about what they were going to be when they grow up, whereas for my sister and I it was about marriage, either to a man or to the church. So it was like looking for jobs that were good hunting grounds for men."

Although her family were very poor and the influence of Catholicism could sometimes be overwhelming, Leslie remembers a lot of love and laughter in her early years. As a teenager she became very involved in the theatre. Her secondary modern school, although Catholic encouraged her to take a more liberal view of religion and she renounced Catholicism altogether due to its emphasis on a negative view of God and a restrictive view of women. At this time she realised that she didn't have to; "...be a good Catholic, get married and breed Catholics, which was the only option I was given". She wanted to go to drama school in London but because of parental disapproval and lack of money had to abandon this idea. She drifted into nursing and various other 'caring' jobs or retail. Later on she studied hard and undertook lots of different courses, mostly in HE. For Leslie, the factors leading to her becoming a feminist were; "being a girl, brought up in the Catholic faith, which is very anti-women. Also the time [i.e. post 1970] when anything felt possible." She has read

rapaciously and describes books as being one of the biggest influences on her life, especially *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer which she remembers reading when she was twenty one and working at a girls' remand home as a trainee childcare officer. The remand home emphasised the importance of (Christian) religion and the Bible. "I would say to the girls, forget that, look at this. This is my Bible and I would read them Germaine Greer". For Leslie; "books like that are wonderful because you see in print what you can't actually voice".

Leslie started to attend feminist events and courses and remembers "... feeling comfortable, but also very challenged". Sometimes groups were set up outside of the course and Leslie became a member of a very long-running consciousness-raising group. She started to experiment with gendered expectations and cut her long hair to a 2 inch crop. She was totally shocked at the hostile and sometimes vitriolic response she received from other women, often strangers; "Men I expected to disapprove because it was like a 'v' sign to them, but women really shocked me, the tuts and sharp intakes of breath. I don't know what it was about but I did learn from it." She went out to Greenham to join in a peace demonstration and would have liked to have become more involved but was unable to, due to the fact that her relationship with her daughter's father had become a violent one. At this time, Leslie felt that other women were very supportive to her and she describes Ellen Malos and Liz Bird as being "absolutely brilliant" to her. Ellen put her in touch with solicitors and with Women's Aid, but Leslie obviously needed time because "...I had nothing, it was his house, I had absolutely no money, nothing.". She left him and went to live in a women's aid refuge for six months. She describes this time as; "a really low period, brought up by the fear of what men could do to you, or the patriarchal society could do. But it actually freed me, oddly enough. All the workshops I'd gone to and books I'd read made me really quite powerful."

She became quite involved with the running of the refuge and went to Women's Aid meetings. She felt the morale of the refuge needed raising and there was certainly more that could be done, for instance; "I was just surprised at what I could do, like the wallpaper [which was peeling] I just ripped it off and said 'the children did that - we need to re-paper this room' the money was there but no-one thought to ask". Whilst she was still at the refuge, Leslie became involved with the Bristol One Parent Project (BOPP), which was just starting. She has very positive feelings about her involvement with BOPP; "It was so wonderful having an organisation to try to right the wrongs of... single parents...I couldn't believe the power that we gained. The women that were there were just so wonderful. Some were really politically minded and they encouraged us and pushed us slightly, but didn't overwhelm us so that we ran off." She helped to set up a housing action group and joined a liaison group with Bristol City Council. She actively supported the setting up of the Women's Committee of the City Council and remembers the frequent battles (especially with Tory councillors) to get women's issues recognised.

In the mid 1980's Leslie attended HE to do a housing degree as a mature student. The course was very male-dominated and some of the lecturers were openly sexist. There seemed to be literally no space for women and Leslie initiated a campaign to get a 'women's room' on campus. Eventually this was accomplished. She was frequently challenging the sexism around her and often raising her hand in lectures to point out sexist assumptions. She also found that much of what was being taught was out of

date and that due to her own involvements she often had more practical relevant knowledge of the topic in question. Eventually she left before completing the course but is quite philosophical about her time there: "... although I didn't finish the course, I did what I needed to do there and I was only able to do that because of the support I'd had over the years from the Women's Movement [i.e.] that it does matter what you feel and that if you are oppressed because of your sex you can challenge that."

In terms of the main achievements of the period, Leslie feels that women began to find a voice and to have that voice recognised, especially in the literature of the time. She also feels positive about various changes in legislation, although acknowledging that they don't go far enough and that (e.g.) women still don't have equal pay. She is very positive about the CR group she was in which ran for many years. She regarded it as both challenging and supportive. She felt that women in the 'second wave' used their anger positively to push for improvement and although that sometimes may have meant espousing an extremist slant or seeing things as more clear cut than they really were, this was probably necessary at the time. She feels that feminism now has generally moved on in terms of recognising diversity and contradiction. She does however have anxieties for young men growing up now (both as a counsellor and as a mother of a young son) and points out that "the stuff that comes out against men now, if this was the 1960's we'd be on their backs". She doesn't feel this is entirely the 'fault' of feminism but does worry that young men are being marginalised in society and that our expectations of men are somewhat ambiguous. She reflects on the circular pattern her life has taken in that in the 1960's-1980's she was working for female equality and now she is tackling similar issues in relation to men. The issue of how to do this without being damaging to women is one that Leslie regards as a very great challenge, both personally and politically.

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

SUE COHEN



Sue currently works as the Co-ordinator of the Single Parent Action Network UK (SPAN). Her main feminist involvements have been: single parent campaigns, helping to set up women's groups in local government, community groups and European networks, published papers on women's experience of social exclusion within European political settings and singing women's blues in pubs and clubs.

Sue was born in Bolton and spent most of her early years growing up in Manchester. She came from a mixed class background and has a mixed ethnic identity as her father was an American Jew and her mother was Welsh and a Gentile. Her father was a GI who met her mother during the war. Both parents were communists at the time and her father became a refugee from America during the McCarthy period. In later years Sue's mother worked in playgroups and eventually for Save the Children while her father took a series of different jobs before studying for a degree and becoming a teacher in his forties.

Sue feels that her early background helped her to become politically conscious; "I was raised to be very class conscious from a young age and always sensitive to oppression and how it operated, but there was not a great deal of discussion when I was young about how women were oppressed." She also describes herself as being; "... very feisty and would stand up for what I believed in." Sue got married at age twenty and was anxious to still be a part of whatever politics or movements were relevant at that time; "I didn't want to stand still in life. I was always seeking out what was happening for the moment. I was very engaged in what was going on in life in a political sense". Sue got involved with various alternative organisations in the 1970's and became a teacher in an alternative school that was based in a community project. She became involved in community action and through this, the women's movement. Coming from a musical family, she also began to sing blues and jazz in public. Unfortunately it was a period of unhappiness in her personal life; "My marriage could not contain my interests and it became an increasingly bitter situation and in the end a violent one." For Sue this painful situation actually spurred her on to become more involved with feminist politics: "... it was through that very personal experience, plus the friends that I had made that I began to see how oppression panned out in the rest of society, and I became more involved". The community project that Sue worked in included a women's room where lots of different consciousness-raising groups met and many feminist activities took place. Sue made friends there, attended socials and

events and shared experiences with other women. This broadened her understanding of the women's liberation movement in general. When her marriage ended she became more politicised through her strong identification with other single parents and the issues that affected them which she describes as "a complex combination of how they were victimised because of class, race, gender, sexuality etc..."

Sue moved to Bristol in 1984 to take up a position as Co-ordinator of the Bristol One Parent Project (BOPP). She remembers being interviewed for the job by up to ten women! (and one man) all of whom were single parents. Sue felt inspired by these women as "they were in a situation where they were linking their own personal experiences and tragedies with the politics of the outside world ... many of them were in difficult housing situations ... had escaped violent relationships etc... and they were very proactive in deciding they were going to do something about their lives, change the world around them and make things better for other single parents". BOPP worked proactively to: improve things for single parents on high- rise estates, developed work on social exclusion in relation to gender, class, income, ethnicity, sexuality and single-parenthood. BOPP also liaised with the city council on single-parent issues, obtained European funding, joined with other projects in different countries and became especially focused on dealing with anti-racist issues. Sue describes this period (i.e. the late 1980's) as one of extreme highs and lows, personally and occupationally. She feels that the major achievement of BOPP was the work done on diversity of single-parent needs and the development of the Single Parent Action Network (SPAN). Sue left BOPP to set up SPAN in 1990. SPAN is a UK organisation with an international reputation and impact. SPAN has put anti-racism on the agenda of the European commission in various ways, helped to develop a European network of one-parent families and developed a UK network in the four nations which supports 1500 individual single parents and single-parent groups. It also instigated a campaign against the CSA and acted at parliamentary level when the present government tried to cut lone-parent benefits.

For Sue, the recognition of the diversity of single parents and the different ways in which they can be socially excluded is crucial; "I can't separate the experience of class, race, sexuality etc... from the experience of being a woman. I think one of the problems of some aspects of feminism, especially in the 1970's was the idea that there was a woman's experience that was somehow essentialist and not impacted on by class or race, for example. I think that continues today to some extent." Sue believes that SPAN embodies a kind of grassroots politics that is embedded in the reality of women's lives. Activists within the organisation have had to develop a good understanding of the consequences of policy. For example SPAN was active in opposing the Child Support Act because of the actual consequences it would have for single parent mothers. Sue points out that such knowledge, when it comes from women is often ignored or belittled and organisations like SPAN are crucial in giving women a voice and allowing them to be heard. Sue feels that one of the major problems of 'second wave feminism' was that "... because of identity politics some people became locked into their identity and there was not significant consideration given on how to move forward from the understandings gained from identity politics. How do we learn about somebody else's identity? and is identity fixed?.. we are generally in a fluid situation and by fixing ourselves it is perhaps difficult to grow and to learn from others". Sue feels that SPAN developed from the theoretical turmoil of the late 80's by "being enriched by diversity, learning from each other's backgrounds

and experiences and moving forward in solidarity. There are commonalities between women and women single-parents and also enormous differences and your strength grows from acknowledging that. I think these sorts of lessons you can take to other situations around building alliances and building movements."

As part of her work with SPAN in European settings Sue has gained a greater understanding of social exclusion and the way in which single-parents can be discriminated against on grounds of race, gender, income, sexuality etc... and the overt and subtle ways space, body and presence are ultimately controlled by a white male middle-class elite especially in political settings. She has also learnt from the women's movement generally about how "... in moments of passion women can overturn all kinds of political dominance [she has experienced this] in meetings where women have just stood up as one body and taken themselves out of that situation saying 'we are no longer going to collude with what is going on here. We will set up our own decision-making group and come back to you and state how women's issues need to be addressed.'" For Sue her involvement in the single parent movement has strengthened and enhanced her commitment to, and understanding of, the women's movement generally.

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

JOAN HAMMOND



Joan Hammond lives in Bristol; her main area of activism was at Greenham Common, although she was involved in activities in Bristol in support of Greenham. Prior to this Joan was a county councillor for the Labour Party, and campaigned largely for children's rights.

Joan grew up in Kent, her father died in World War One and her mother brought up Joan and her sister whilst working to support them too. There was much talk at home of peace and no more war. During the Second World War Joan lived in a communal house that took in conscientious objectors. There was a lot of stigma attached to this but Joan says that there was the influence of her grandfather, who was an "old socialist" who stood by "wars are capitalist wars". This had/has an enormous effect on Joan's life and she has always been involved in the peace movement. Joan married and had three children, who were all brought up as pacifists. Her husband she describes as a "good one" as he worked hard and gave her time to focus her attention to being a labour county councillor in Hertfordshire. Joan successfully campaigned for many issues; safer children's playgrounds and children's rights are just some of them. In the area Joan lived (Welwyn Garden City), there was already a section of the women's movement forming and she too began to be involved. There were house talks and groups and Joan felt that "all women friends enriched each other".

After attending the first Greenham March, Joan moved to Bristol and joined the Greenham supporters group there, post settling in new surroundings. This group met at the Women's Centre or at the Quaker Meeting House. Apart from attending Greenham, they organised actions in Bristol. Joan mentions being involved in making life size puppets of judges/businessmen "the power team" and attaching them to the Bristol Bridge. Women from Bristol would go to Greenham two Sundays a month. Once there, they were well organised into groups: these would be either support or action based groups. Actions could be sitting on the roadside shouting "missiles out", to putting bolt cutters in your knitting bag and off to cut the perimeter fence. Joan recalls how incredibly brave and supportive the women were to each other, and how they would just go up and hug new women to the camp, who would often exhaust themselves with their desire to "be active". Joan states that it wasn't all nice "it was a horrifying experience, noisy and nasty". She remembers feeling more afraid at Greenham than she had been during the war. As Joan describes, "being bombed was

remote not personal" whereas at Greenham, the treatment of the women was both personal and distressing. Women returning home post-Greenham, were often "not good for anything much", it had detrimental effects on both their physical and emotional health. Within Joan's experience at Greenham, she proudly remembers herself, daughter and granddaughter being there. Joan was 60 when she first went to Greenham, however the oldest woman she met there was 92!

During this time, Joan travelled alone to Geneva, and met up with women from various European countries. Having no plans as to where to stay, she found herself staying in a peace caravan in the car park outside the United Nations building. It was the meetings at the United Nations that brought the women there. Joan attended meetings Tuesday and Thursday, and the rest of the time was spent putting up banners and making their presence known. One outcome of Geneva, was discovering and making public, that canisters of anthrax had been found buried on a Scottish island, that were later cleaned up. Another anti-nuclear campaign which Joan was involved in was Hinckley Point; she was a "back-stop" and also spoke at conferences publicising concerns and testifying publicly against it. Joan feels that there was a definite "positive fall-out" from the women's camp at Greenham. The women who were so active in the Miners' Strike, drew some of their strength to "break away" from being inspired by Greenham women. As Joan states, "when women work together they can do fantastic things" and Greenham has served to be a fine example of this.

On reflection, Joan feels that this time showed and demonstrated great empowerment for women and feels that there was a place for very outspoken anti-men style feminism. Joan doesn't feel that type of feminism so necessary now, "women still have the double bind of children and work, it's still hard, everybody wants so much stuff". Joan has brought her family up as pacifists and to think about how they behave towards others. This has continued with her daughter and grandchildren, but, despite nuclear weapons being off the political/global agenda, Joan is inclined to still ponder about the return of vigilance, "they need watching"!

Interviewed by Viv Honeybourne

MARIAN LIEBMANN



Marian currently works as a mediation consultant and trainer (she is the former director of Mediation UK) and as an art therapist. Her main feminist involvements have been: taking part in women's groups (e.g. women's peace group, Jewish feminist group), co-leading a probation service women's group, running a women's art therapy group (and contributing a chapter on this to the book *Feminist Approaches to Art Therapy*) occasional visits to Greenham women's peace camp, and generally presenting a feminist point of view in work with clients and in policy making committees .

Marian was born in 1942. Her parents were Jewish refugees who fled from Nazi Germany in 1937. Marian and her brother (three years younger) grew up in Cambridge, Aldermaston and later in Reading. Her parents were both scientists with doctorates in physics although anti-Semitism had severely blighted their academic careers in Germany. So, for her parents, "an untroubled education for their children was number one on their list." Marian describes her background as middle class and liberal with regard to issues of religion and gender. Her parents were non-religious Jews and Marian wasn't given any Jewish religious instruction. Her parents had her christened in the Church of England to be 'truly British'. She was always aware of their status as German Jewish immigrants and found growing up to be socially isolating at times due to her awareness of these differences.

Marian was encouraged by her parents to go on to university to read physics, although she now feels she would have been more suited to studying social science. She describes the ascent through school and university as being rather mechanical and she graduated with no clear idea of what she wanted to do. Marian initially became a teacher which she didn't like and since then has had several different occupations which have led on from each other. After teaching, she worked in educational writing for 5 years, then at a day centre for ex-offenders which she describes as her 'best job ever'. She also worked for Victim Support and later qualified as a probation officer and worked in the probation service. Then she worked for Mediation UK and was the director of the organisation for 4 years. She also undertook a qualification in art therapy and now works as an art therapist part-time whilst also working freelance in mediation consultancy and training.

Marian feels that growing up in the 1950s was quite an oppressive time for girls and young women and she realised this quite early on: "When I was a teenager, or even younger, I just thought that life was unfair. That boys had a better deal, they were allowed to do more things and they weren't restricted like girls... I thought it would be better to be a boy, but if I said so, this was viewed as a sign of maladjustment, so I learned to keep my views to myself". When the [second wave of the] women's liberation movement came along, Marian was very relieved and took this as a confirmation that she was right all along. She describes its significance to her as being "... a vindication of what I had always thought, that women should have equal rights to men and they should have all their achievements valued". However, she believes that this rhetoric is the 'easy' part and for true equality to be worked for and achieved we need to get over the lack of confidence that women and girls have in a culture of oppression. An example of her own lack of confidence was when she was at university studying physics, she came to believe tutors when they said that women couldn't do physics. It was only after she graduated with a very good degree (narrowly missing first class honours) that she realised that this sex discrimination had really affected how she saw herself. She has also noticed discrimination in work contexts especially in the voluntary sector (due in part to lack of regulation), also in the probation service and later in her high profile position with Mediation UK. This had led her to conclude that there have been "... numerous occasions in life when I have been put down due to my gender. A man can just walk in and be OK just because he is a man. Women always have to try harder and do things better."

Marian spent five years in a women's peace group which was very important to her personally and politically. Through this involvement she came to realise that she had "... quite unconsciously valued the things men did more, and seen men's participation as more important ... the women's group helped me value the things that women did, and if a group was all women, then that was fine. It would be more likely to get on with the job and be more likely to involve co-operation and less likely to get stuck on ego-tripping."

When Marian worked for the probation service she was shocked at the institutional sexism that she found. Many of her male colleagues made sexist jokes and treated female colleagues and clients in a condescending and harassing manner. She challenged this consistently but often met with opposition and misunderstanding; "One person who thought he understood said 'Right, I'll never open a door for you again'. It was just so tiresome. As far as I was concerned, anyone can open doors for anyone else, man or woman, but I don't particularly want doors opened for me as a woman if the other side of that coin means that I don't qualify for other more important things". The female secretaries were also quite sexist towards Marian and the one other woman probation officer in the team at that time. They seemed to feel that being a probation officer was a 'man's job' and that only the men in the team deserved respect. At one point Marian chose to expose these attitudes by using her art therapy training to offer an exercise on a team-building day, in which everyone drew a metaphorical image of how they saw the team. She and her colleague had discussed their image of the team and decided to present it: "a kind of football team where the women were allowed to bring out the oranges at half time". The men were very surprised and challenged by this, and useful discussion ensued.

Marian also ran a women's group for women probation clients, to empower the women and to combat their isolation. The criminal justice system often does not take women's needs into account - this is a subject Marian feels passionately about and tried to address in this group and in her probation practice generally. She points out that women tend to commit different crimes from men and for different reasons. For example, far more women than men offend out of poverty and even those who have committed serious offences are often in extremely oppressive circumstances and trying to escape them. An example she gives is women from poor countries who act as 'mules' carrying an unknown package (usually drugs) on an aeroplane for which they are usually punished very severely when caught. Marian points out that women are treated very differently from men under the law: "some people think they are treated leniently, but I think they are treated leniently up to a certain point and then: Crunch! Not only have you done something wrong but you've been a very unwomanly woman... you discover women in prison for crimes that no man would go to prison for." Marian is angered that the rate of incarceration for women has accelerated more than that for men, and women often aren't given non-custodial alternatives that should be available to them. For example, many community service projects are based around heavy manual work which may not be suitable for women, and childcare facilities are rarely provided for them. Although now childcare facilities are provided, Marian thinks that women still find it harder to complete sentences because of their usual role as main carer for their children. Although she has not written anything in this area, Marian has tried to keep up to date with research.

Marian recently wrote a chapter for a book *Feminist Approaches to Art Therapy* about a women's group on a housing estate. She tried to adopt a qualitative and feminist methodology for this in order to reflect those women's experiences accurately and respectfully: "I first got them to tell me the kinds of questions and areas they thought it was important for me to write about. Then I wrote up the questions... then they each chose the questions that they would answer. I put it into order somehow and they chose the pictures to go with it." Her feminist commitment has obviously impacted on her working life but Marian also describes it as 'an everyday thing'. For example, she feels strongly about the issue of joint parenting (unusual in the late 1970s when her daughter was born). Her husband does the bulk of the domestic work while she earns most of the money. Marian kept her own surname after marriage and fought very hard to be assessed separately from her husband for tax and insurance purposes. Both of them also tried very hard to bring her daughter up in a non-sexist manner and she regards this as generally successful: "I think my daughter's quite a feisty young woman and I think she's quite pleased that she's had some messages to get up and do her own thing." Marian belongs to the Quakers and one of the reasons she joined is that they are very non-hierarchical with equal roles for women, although: "You still have to watch out for [men avoiding] washing up and making coffee - but there are no bars against women holding office and that kind of equality is very important to me".

In terms of the achievements of the (post 1970) period, Marian cites feminist research on the criminal justice system as being particularly important in highlighting gross inequalities in women's treatment under the law. She does however stress that research findings obviously need the political will to put them into practice and this has often been lacking, with reports often being shelved because 'there are no resources' or 'too few women in the criminal justice system to make this economic'.

She is also very proud of women's achievements at Greenham, in which she played a very small part. She feels it is incredibly important to make sure that men do their share of domestic tasks and that feminism has shown that this is not a trivial concern. Marian believes it is extremely important to challenge sexism in all areas of life and that those who believe we are in a post-feminist era and need not bother any more, are mistaken - all the gains have to be sustained and put into practice, otherwise they just slip back. She reflects on the contemporary dilemma of how to regard women in non-western cultures who may appear 'downtrodden'. She feels that this is a 'sensitive and tricky business' but exploring it is vital in our multicultural society. Marian believes it is of vital importance that the gains of the women's liberation movement should apply to all women, not just those from the west.

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

ELLEN MALOS



Ellen Malos is a senior lecturer in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol. She is generally regarded as the most pivotal person in terms of WLM involvement in Bristol. Her feminist activities have been numerous, here are some of the main ones: employment related campaigns, reproductive rights campaigns, the Bristol Women's Centre, Women's Aid, research on gender issues and published books including *The Politics of Housework*. She was also a member of the 'Half the Sky' collective and has taught women's studies courses (some with Caroline New, Liz Bird, Jackie West and others).

Ellen grew up in a former gold mining town in Australia. She describes her family as being 'respectable' working class and politically aware although not necessarily active. Ellen was the first member of her family to go on to University and she was aware of this being problematic in some respects: "... my mother saw me as crossing a divide...and she was terribly worried about whether I would be ashamed of my background". Ellen came to England in 1962 to do a PhD. She was married with a young son and found the academic environment to be very hostile to women with children. She badly needed a university nursery, but there wasn't one and childcare was very difficult to arrange. The professor of English at the time told her supervisor that it was 'preposterous' that she should be studying for a PhD when she had a young child. Eventually she had to abandon it for the above reasons and undertook some part-time teaching. This lack of support made her more aware of inequalities in the way that women were treated which partly led on to her involvement with feminist issues and causes; "I suppose I had always thought of myself as being what we now call a feminist... so when the women's movement started I was certainly ready for it". Ellen feels that her personal involvement with the women's movement grew from the fact that; "You were told... growing up in the post-war period, that women could do anything". Unfortunately this rhetoric of optimism was very different from the reality of many women's lives, even middle class women. Ellen gives this example from her own experience, when she was a teacher she developed a sore throat from having to shout at pupils and when she went to the doctor he asked her; "Which job are you going to give up? Teaching or your marriage?" Ellen found his attitude incomprehensible but it provoked her into becoming more involved in campaigns that tried to challenge the way that women were viewed and treated.

In 1969, Ellen became involved with the National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights which campaigned for Britain to sign an important charter on labour and equal rights for women and to implement equal pay and equal opportunities legislation. From the early 1970's an important focus of the women's

movement was employment-related issues and how they affected women. Ellen remembers campaigns in support of the Ford women's strike, the Hull fisherwomen's strike and the night cleaners' strike. The night cleaners were women who cleaned office blocks at night for appalling pay and conditions because they had no childcare. Ellen and her friend Lee Cataldi organised a meeting in Bristol in support of the National Joint Action Campaign. They contacted the women's editor of the Bristol Evening Post and as a result the campaign received good media coverage. Despite some confusion about the location of the meeting, various groups of people attended from women's organisations and trade unions etc... Another meeting was arranged at Ellen and Lee's house in St Michael's Park. Initially just Ellen and Lee turned up and they waited and waited and were about to abandon the meeting for the pub when Monica Sjoo and Pat van Twest (now Pat West) arrived. Ellen cites this meeting as being a very important embryonic stage in the evolution of the WLM in Bristol. A new group formed alongside the NJAC group which initially included the above women plus the artist Beverley Skinner. Most of the women were single parents and were quite politicised about this due to their experiences of isolation, discrimination and lack of childcare. The difficulties that such women often experienced in obtaining maintenance payments from former partners (due in part to bureaucratic legislation) had become a public issue and was an early focus for campaigns. Eventually some changes were made to the system, although it still discriminates against women to some extent.

The early members of the WLM in Bristol decided on a structure of weekly meetings that alternated between an organised one on equal pay issues (which men could initially attend) and a more informal women-only meeting where women would discuss their lives in more detail and initiate other campaigns. The meetings were initially held in Ellen's flat in Apsley Road and a diverse collection of discussion groups, campaigning groups and meetings began to emerge. Ellen remembers new groups being formed all the time. These met in different women's houses every night of the week. By the early 1970's the women's movement in Bristol was dynamic and thriving. The magazine *Enough* was produced regularly as were the newsletters and the articles for the Bristol Evening Post. A group of women from Bristol went to the pivotal Ruskin Conference in Oxford in 1970 and participated in national WLM demonstrations and campaigns. However, most of the meetings were in the Redland/Clifton/Cotham area and this could make it very difficult for women from other areas to get involved particularly if they had no transport. Such geographical issues were important and were also linked to class issues. Women from the group linked up with women living and working in Hartcliffe, conducting street surveys and holding meetings to allow women there to say what they thought of their local facilities and what changes they wanted. A campaign was started up for a nursery and better shopping facilities in this area.

Another major focus of the women's movement at this time was reproductive rights. The Bristol group that campaigned on this was affiliated to the national 'Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign', a precursor to the National Abortion Campaign (with an obvious difference of emphasis). Ellen remembers the priority being women's right to control their own fertility and lives. The slogan of the time was; "Women must control their fate, not the Church and not the state". A leaflet was drawn up with the help of a cartoonist to publicise the services of the Brook Clinic in Bristol in supplying the contraceptive pill to young unmarried women. Ellen

remembers the seemingly innocuous leaflet running into legal difficulties regarding the Obscene Publications Act and women who distributed it in town were often moved on. Eventually a slight change of emphasis meant the legal difficulties were circumvented. By 1973 pregnancy testing was also regularly carried out in the basement of Ellen's house in Redland, which was established as the Bristol Women's Centre. This service was able to give quick results and the women who did the tests would talk with the women who used the service about the results and the possible implications. The women who used this service were diverse; "What surprised us is that... we thought that most of the women who would use the service would be women who didn't want to be pregnant but that wasn't the case... Many were women who were quite happy to be pregnant but just wanted to know ... or older women who were having menopause babies and didn't quite know what they thought about it ... it was the whole spectrum of women."

Ellen was also deeply involved in establishing Bristol Women's Aid, although its beginnings were almost accidental. There was a bed in the Women's Centre which was occasionally used by women attending conferences. A woman called Helen Donaghue who knew Ellen through the WLM asked if the bed could occasionally be used by homeless people referred by the Samaritans where Helen's husband worked. The group agreed and soon the Centre was contacted regularly by police, social services and sometimes by homeless people directly. Lots of different types of people stayed there temporarily until a decision was made that women escaping domestic violence were most in need of temporary accommodation, and least likely to be helped by other agencies (as they were not classed as homeless at this time). Many women used the service but the situation was obviously not ideal. In addition to it being in the basement of Ellen's family home, the activities of the Women's Centre were also severely disrupted if for example a woman was asleep in the bed during the morning pregnancy testing service. A campaign was organised to establish a refuge along the lines of Chiswick Women's Aid which had also begun from a Women's Centre. The campaign group included members of the Samaritans, social workers and women from the Women's Centre. It took two years for a separate refuge to be founded. The group also campaigned for changes in the law regarding domestic violence so that women escaping from it could be classed as homeless and could therefore apply for alternative accommodation. This campaign was largely successful and by the mid 1970's a national network of women's refuges had started to be developed.

Ellen looks back on the 'second wave' period as one which; "Put the idea of women's needs on the map [in] a climate that was ready for it." She feels it is important to recognise that women have specific needs and that equality goes beyond being treated the same as men. The whole issue of what women do with their lives and how they are viewed in society has to be examined and the debates and activities of the period put these issues on the agenda for the first time. She also feels that some of the key issues of the period had always been important to women but were not previously a focus for political activity e.g. reproductive rights, domestic violence, sexuality etc... This was partly due to the important idea that 'the personal is political' i.e. "...there wasn't a sphere that was private where the state shouldn't intrude that had no relevance to the public domain. It was very important for issues like birth control and domestic violence to be able to say 'look, these are public issues'". Ellen does however concede that some of the gains of the women's movement have been lost

particularly in the years of the Thatcher government. She also points out that some issues and campaigns of that time are still relevant e.g. the campaigns regarding women's financial status under the benefits system, which in the 1970's revolved around the issue of retaining family allowance as a payment to the carer rather than a tax credit to the husband. This is obviously relevant to the newly implemented tax credits which can discriminate against women who are full-time mothers. However, Ellen is generally very positive about the achievements of the period and about her own involvement and regards it as a very unique time. "Despite all the differences, we managed to find a common purpose and the differences were subordinate to being part of a movement."

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

CAROLINE NEW



Caroline is currently a lecturer in Sociology at Bath Spa University College. In the 1970's her feminist involvement included: consciousness-raising groups, general membership of the Bristol Women's Liberation Group including the Women and Children's Group, the Working Women's Charter Group, National Abortion Campaign, and National Childcare Campaign. In the 1980's she was a supporter and visitor of the Greenham women's peace camp and used to stay on guard overnight to relieve permanent campers. As an academic in the 1990's she has taught and written about feminism. In 1995 she went with the Re-evaluation Counselling 'No Limits for Women' delegation to the non governmental forum alongside the UN 4th conference on women in Beijing and helped offer support groups and workshops to promote unity among women. She took part in various activities after Beijing organised around the 'Platform for Action'. In 1996 she organised a 'No Limits for Women' delegation at the conference on Women and Violence in Brighton.

In terms of her early background, Caroline grew up in a first generation middle class family (mother a teacher, father eventually became a civil servant) near Cardiff. She remembers her parents being very pro-education and as being socialists and pacifists. She describes herself as being 'a political animal' from an early age and was involved in CND whilst still at school. Caroline went on to study at New Hall College, Cambridge which she later realised embodied "a kind of 1920's feminism which emphasised that women should have the best in education". However, this blueprint offered no guidelines as to how to deal with the 1960's e.g. sex, drugs etc.... and Caroline was unhappy and felt that she experienced sexism without really knowing what it was. In 1968 she became a Marxist and encountered the beginnings of 'second wave feminism' but was initially unimpressed. She remembers hearing about the 1969 Miss World demonstration (where feminists stormed the stage to protest at the sexism inherent in beauty contests) and at the time she thought it sounded rather trivial: "I felt you shouldn't dignify such things by paying them attention. You should just ignore them." Although Caroline had always believed women should be equal it was not until she moved to Durham in 1970 that she started to identify as a feminist. In Durham she set up a consciousness-raising group which also had a political focus, for example solidarity actions with miners' wives. Around this time she was also involved in the Women's National Co-ordinating Committee.

Caroline moved to Bristol in 1972 when she was married and pregnant with her daughter Sarah. She remembers going to the general meetings of the Women's Movement in Bristol and editing the monthly newsletters for a while. She still felt some ambivalence towards some aspects of the feminist movements and as a married heterosexual woman with a small child she encountered some hostility. "I was scared of the women's movement breaking up my marriage and persuading me that men were the main enemy." She concedes that her understanding of sexual politics at this time was quite naïve and she was disappointed by some other women's hostility towards men in general which sometimes extended to male children. Caroline remembers some women in a consciousness-raising group in Bristol as being repulsed by her breastfeeding her baby daughter, although she stresses that not all sections of the women's movement were like this. She joined a mothers-with-children group and also became actively involved in the Working Women's Charter Campaign which was a nationwide socialist feminist campaign which tried to achieve genuine equality for women wage workers. She remembers being present at strike meetings in the Wills tobacco factory. She also attended a 'Reclaim the Night' march and 'Sistershow' (which she describes as being incredibly funny). She also argued with the Wages for Housework consortium and wrote an article *When is a Wage not a Wage?* which appeared in Red Rag and also in *The Politics of Housework* edited by Ellen Malos. Caroline found the idea of commodifying personal relationships rather disturbing and felt that to do so would be to ensure women were subordinated. She and Ellen ran a feminist theory course at Bristol University Extra Mural department and Caroline is able to reflect on the fact that they ran it in a very traditional way which didn't connect women's feelings and experiences with theory. She now feels that she would run it differently because she has "learnt more from co-counselling about the principles that some people in the women's movement [already] understood, than from the women's movement itself".

Although Caroline is sometimes critical of certain aspects of the women's movement, and indeed of some of the roles and beliefs she has held in the past, she is still proud to have been involved and believes great progress has been made for all women. "My students usually say they are not feminists, and then I take the major demands of the women's movement and they all agree that these demands should be met... At the level of attitudes, liberal feminism has won." She cites the refuge movement, changing Police attitudes and some changes in medical practice regarding abortion and contraception, as being major breakthroughs. Although she is fairly clear that the battle has not yet been won and cites women's lower earnings as some troubling evidence for this. She also believes the rhetoric of postfeminism to be anti-women. Caroline stressed repeatedly that middle class intellectuals like herself were by no means the whole of the women's movement and that many working class women played an invaluable part, often in difficult personal circumstances. She also feels that there are people less extrovert than herself whose achievements tend to be overlooked, "It's a pity if we have too narrow a definition of what the women's movement was". She sums up the energy of the times by saying: "The women's movement could look shambolic at times, but by God we got things done!"

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

ANGELA RODAWAY

Angela Rodaway has had a long involvement with feminist activities in the Bristol area. Some of these have been: consciousness-raising groups, WACC, The Bristol Women's Centre, 'Sistershow'. Angela regards herself primarily as a writer but has had a varied career which included being trained in drama and being involved with the theatre, radio and the arts. She also became a teacher and taught different subjects including Geography, Religious Studies and English. She is now retired, although she works as a volunteer for the Arnolfini Gallery and also continues to write and to give regular readings of her poetry.

Angela grew up in a working class household in London in the 1930's. She describes her mother as being a strong and capable person who was frustrated and stifled by her role as housewife and mother of Angela and the twins. Due to the social climate of the time, Angela's mother was unable to work outside of the home: "In those days it was accepted that a married woman didn't work for money because she would be taking the job away from a married man and everybody accepted this. Any responsible firm didn't employ married women and if you got married you automatically left." As a result, Angela's family was entirely supported by her father, even though her mother would have been a better breadwinner. They were very poor as her father only managed to get casual jobs between long periods of unemployment. The family also felt very stigmatised by having to exist at times on benefits which they considered quite shameful. Her mother's situation made Angela aware quite early of the oppression that women suffered and is one of the factors that lead her to become involved in the feminist movement.

As a young woman Angela had many different jobs (including working for the Fire Service during the war) and at one point she even went on the dole in order to pursue her creative involvements, a fact which would have scandalised her family but was acceptable among the more middle class artistic people she had come to associate with. Angela trained as a teacher and taught in London before leaving in 1960 to work as a residential boarding school teacher. She hated working in boarding schools due to the atmosphere of sexism and class privilege. She left the school and moved to Bristol where she initially lived in Upper Wells St, an archaic street of short life housing (long since demolished) where rent was £100 a year! She described this area at the time as being very vibrant and attracting interesting and creative people. Angela became involved in consciousness-raising groups which she describes as being very important and transformative both on an individual and societal level. She also became involved in WACC (Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign) as reproductive rights were an important focus of the women's movement in this period. Angela expressed its importance succinctly; "Our first concern then was contraception because we felt that if you couldn't regulate your own body then you couldn't regulate anything." Angela regards the WACC as being very important and stressed how difficult it was to obtain contraception in the 1960's and early 1970's. Eventually National Abortion Campaign (NAC) became more prominent and WACC ceased to exist but Angela feels it is very important to acknowledge that WACC came first and wasn't just about abortion. When legal abortion was first introduced it was still a difficult process trying to obtain one as it was only legal in certain circumstances and

with the assent of two different doctors etc... Angela believes that the slow progress towards abortion on demand (which is still not complete) is typical of the way the political process works against women; "This is what happens frequently, you demand things and then you are given half which just weakens the demand. It's terribly difficult to go on demanding when you have been given just a bit... It happened with the suffragettes and women over thirty getting the vote, whereas men over twenty one had it and it was a long time before women got it equally".

Angela believed in all the other demands of the WLM apart from the demand for 24 hour childcare. She felt that this was unrealistic as it seemed to be required so that women could work unsociable hours or do shift work which was simply impractical if you have young children. She often looked after children so that their mothers could attend meetings or demonstrations. Angela remembers going on demonstrations for equal pay and also remembers the bad press that these demonstrations often received; "The demo's were often televised, but they did everything they could to make us look unsympathetic. I remember passing a 'Mothercare' shop and outside was an army of police, as though anyone concerned with women's liberation didn't like children." When women were arrested on demo's they were often treated very badly and television appearances were often engineered to portray WLM members in an unfavourable light; "Without telling one group they got a rugby team to 'balance' things, or that's what they said. It meant that women got worked up and they shouted and it just looked awful." She felt that in retrospect women were fairly naïve with regard to the media, for instance demo's were often held on Saturdays so that women with children could attend. An unfortunate consequence was that demo's would receive little or no media coverage as the weekend papers wouldn't cover them and by Monday they were no longer considered newsworthy.

Angela attended several of the National Women's Liberation conferences and she remembers one in London as being particularly informative; "There was a woman medic there and one of the things we were trying to do was to work towards a greater awareness of our own bodies and she had speculums... We were given them so that everyone had one each and nobody used it but oneself so that we could examine our cervixes and those of our sisters. Also we learned to locate the uterus with one hand internally and the other hand externally. I feel that young people have missed out on that because we don't seem to have conferences like that and we don't seem to have that level of awareness". Angela was also involved in 'Sistershow' a feminist cabaret act which included reviews and sketches and original comedy material. She points out how unusual it was at the time to use comedy to get a feminist point across; "Men frequently take off women... women never do it to men. Whereas we did ... some of the men in the audience, really nice men, were absolutely squirming at some of the things that we did." She was also involved with Enough the Bristol Women's Liberation Movement magazine which included poetry, essays, sketches and philosophy etc... The magazine proved very popular but has sadly ceased to be produced since the mid 1980's due to lack of involvement, facilities and money.

Angela was involved with the Bristol Women's Centre from it's beginnings in Ellen's (Malos) basement kitchen. She helped out with the pregnancy testing service at the centre and remembers having to be trained in this as the process was then quite complicated. After a while the Women's Centre relocated to a small hut in The Grove. Unfortunately there was a break-in which Angela feels was highly

suspicious. She points out that although nothing was stolen, many things were vandalised and the break-in itself was cleverly done. It appeared that the Centre had been targeted deliberately by an organised group. The next incarnation of the centre was in the basement of Greenleaf Books. Again this was far from ideal as there was no disabled access and the room was small and unwelcoming. The following site at Barton Hill settlement was also problematic as there was no toilet and no washing-up facilities, but the centre was still very busy, attracting 2000 people a year at one point. Eventually the Women's Centre was no longer viable due in part to a lack of volunteers and of funding. Angela feels that the training for volunteers was perhaps too intensive (with women having to repeat the whole programme if they left for six months or more) and may have put people off becoming involved. Angela was the last person to leave the Women's Centre and was left with the task of clearing up and distributing books and artefacts which went to a Welsh Women's Centre, to Amnesty International and to the Feminist Archive respectively. She was very saddened at this demise and firmly believes that Bristol desperately needs a Women's Centre.

Angela is now involved in a small feminist spirituality group called Ama Mawu (named after an African goddess. Amu = mother, Mawu = the goddess) which celebrates the earth, fertility, the female body and the evolution of humankind. Some of the women in this group have used the understanding they have acquired to gain a greater appreciation of their own body and its cycles; "We had one or two people in the Ama Mawu movement who have been having trouble with periods and who have been deliberately keeping the light on during the night at the time of the full moon and keeping themselves in darkness as much as possible during the dark moon and they have regulated their own periods to be in phase with the moon and a lot of the trouble has stopped.... This is a sort of global harmony because the moon is full everywhere in the world at the same time." Angela writes stories, songs and poems that celebrate fertility and the idea of the goddess. For example, during the interview she described how a pregnant woman carrying a daughter is effectively carrying three generations as the unborn daughter has all her eggs in her womb from about six months gestation. She has written a short song about this for the Ama Mawu group which she sang to me;

Daughter unborn in the womb of mother

Cradles within her a new generation

Woman is now and forever

The trinity true in all time (to the tune of an old folk song and lullaby).

When asked about the general achievements of the 'second wave' period, Angela believes there is still more work to be done and she points out that; "We've only half achieved everything typically... we haven't got equal pay for equal work. I know that people can bring an action against an employer where it can be shown that the work they do is equal but we haven't really got that and women's pay is only about 70% of men's overall. Equal job opportunities we wanted as well and we certainly haven't got that, we've got a glass ceiling instead... it's not only a glass ceiling... we don't get the same job opportunities." She also feels that young women in general have very little knowledge of their own bodies and that very little progress has been made on this issue. On a more positive note, she is pleased that there is now a far greater acceptance of single parents and no longer a stigma of illegitimacy. She is also pleased that there is a greater availability of contraception than before and that this is

no longer stigmatised. Her answer to the perennial question of what women need/want is fairly succinct; "...I think it's a daft question. Women want what everybody wants practically from birth. To have control over their own lives."

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

MONICA SJÓÓ



Monica grew up in Sweden; both her parents were artists and she describes herself as having a non-privileged background. Monica's experience as a young Swedish woman was seeing women keep their own names when married, and unsupported mothers being given the best advantages. After running away from home at 16, Monica worked as a nude model, feeling 'objectified' -- she remembers seeing some of the worst exploitative attitudes from male artists. Monica married a British man and was shocked by how British women accepted their conditions, so different to the ways and culture of her native Sweden. After nine years of marriage and giving birth to two sons, she had "had enough" and in 1965 returned to Sweden with one of her sons. From arriving in Sweden she got very actively involved in the Vietnam Movement, which was "pro women and pro women leadership". At this time Monica reflects that she was a "budding feminist", working closely with Siri Derkest, a feminist artist in her 60's. Siri proved inspirational: "a radical socialist feminist, she was talking about women/women's history/patriarchy/matriarchy". Monica worked with Siri for a year: "she cussed, swore, was wonderful and beautiful, my first role model as an artist and feminist".

In 1967 Monica returned to Britain angry with men in the anarchist movement, whom she found increasingly chauvinistic towards women, and she found herself taking a feminist position. Two years on she was denied an abortion, and describes herself "in a rage", and that she was "made to feel like a naughty girl". Around this time (about 1969) she heard about other women getting together to found the Women's Liberation Movement in Bristol. The meetings were held at Ellen Malos's house and Monica started attending. For the whole summer Monica recalls how enraged she continued to feel. A painful and terrifying experience of seeing another women haemorrhaging after a 'backstreet' abortion left her feeling she "couldn't go through with it" herself.

In 1968 Monica attended the St Ives Festival, where she exhibited six of her paintings: "some were six feet high and some were sexually explicit". Inspired by the birth of her son in 1961, "God Giving Birth" depicted her increased awareness of the Goddess through the experience of natural childbirth. When this painting was hung in the Town Hall, the police were called to remove it, and subsequently nobody was allowed to show her paintings. "It was absolutely horrendous, it felt like a witch hunt." Monica felt unsupported by the St.Ives artists, her work being seen as political

and not 'abstract'. In spite of this harsh treatment, Monica remained true to her work. She resolved to exhibit in future with other women, with a clearly stated programme.

By 1970, she was asked to contribute to a conference in Liverpool on Abortion and Contraception for which she wrote a long paper. Monica had no formal art training or academic background, so she remembers not knowing what a paragraph was. Interestingly Monica traced the history of abortion right back to early Egyptian and Goddess cultures. She also made the connection between "witches" being early healers and midwives, at a time when nobody in this country was making that kind of connection. Monica founded the Women and Contraception Campaign (WACC) in Bristol. She has fond memories of the hard work and dedication from all the women in the group, such as Betty Underwood.

Her own experience of social security being paid to her husband not her, enraged her and this became the catalyst for setting up a local Claimants Union. The anarchist speaker Pauline Gift (from Birmingham) spoke at the first meeting. Monica describes Pauline as a "real powerhouse" finding her an inspiration. For the next two years the hard work continued with the Claimants Union, fuelled by the right for women to have the right to independent money.

1973 found influential events happening: Monica cites attending Acton Town Hall Conference (her first meeting with Selma James), where she exhibited her paintings. Later that year Monica talks of falling in love with a woman, which obviously had complicated implications for her marriage. This year also saw the Bristol Conference, much remembered for the evening performance of Sistershow. Monica remembers a great circle of women dancing ecstatic and naked, although she adds "me and Dale didn't, we stayed at the bar!" Monica also places first meeting Dale Wakefield around this time at the May Day March, this saw the start of a long and still existing friendship. Monica felt it was time to start a Gay Women's Group, but she recalls some women visibly shrinking from her when she mentioned this idea. However the group got started and ran for the next four years. Monica states that she wanted a group that "would give me sustenance, comfort, support and fun". Monica was involved in establishing the Matriarchy Resource and Research Study Group in London, that still publishes/produces a newsletter; Monica often contributed to their journal Arachne.

From around the time of the Claimants Union, Monica had been working with the Wages for Housework women. Monica worked with Wages Due, the lesbian part of this group. This continued until Selma James 'discovered' an article where Monica had been described as an anarchist feminist. This led to her being asked to London to be effectively "interrogated" as to her politics. Monica, ever true to grassroots decentralised politics and non hierarchical practice, was duly excommunicated. On reflection she feels it was the elitism of Wages for Housework and their inclination to hierarchical practice that impeded their ability to become a more dynamic and sustaining group.

In 1974 Monica was invited to talk about her painting to a Peace Study Group in Birmingham. So she collated the reams of notes she had taken over the last twenty years, from many varied and often obscure resources. This became 30 or so A3 pages long and a pamphlet taken from these notes was the forerunner of *The Great*

Cosmic Mother. Monica was asked to present a talk to a conference held by a student Christian movement. This group was radical at the time and led by Marie Condren who had been a nun in Ireland. The conference was named "Womenspirit" and Monica was asked to talk about the Goddess. Marie spoke about Christianity and how it had liberated women from the exploitation of the pagans, describing the Virgin Mary treading on the serpent. Monica enraged "whipped out her notes" and talked about serpent symbolism within Goddess spirituality at vigorous length. She remembers the audience were silent: "they were stunned and in absolute shock". This day also had a hugely profound impact on Marie, who much later studied under Mary Daly. Marie later published a book *The Serpent and the Goddess* which Monica describes as brilliant, "the most devastating critique of Christianity".

Monica looks back to 1971 and remembers that four other women artists and herself finally got a major exhibition. This was held at the exhibition hall at Swiss Cottage Library in London. It was a great triumph as it was the first women's exhibition, aptly named "Images of Women Power". This art was not abstract: "as oppressed women we couldn't afford to be abstract, this work was figurative". Monica finishes this first interview by saying she had seen how the art world had "shat on her parents" and she had no respect for the art world or academia. Monica feels that growing up with parents who were artists, un-privileged and working class led her to feel this way. "I am an unusual combination really".

On her second interview, Monica continues to reflect on events pertaining to Swiss Cottage Library. Meetings were held there as Monica was threatened with court action over her painting "God Giving Birth"; the charge was "obscenity and blasphemous". Monica talks at length about her "huge struggle" to overcome looking at the world through a male gaze, to truly see the world and paint it representing her experience. Monica acknowledged that many women found it hard to devote energy and time to painting. Affording the materials, finding the physical space to create, was still hard for women who had been made to feel guilty and selfish for pursuing their creative needs. Patriarchal society had drained women of their creativity. Monica was daring to talk about women in Cosmic terms; this caused a scandal, including her use of "ugly" women in her work, that were not 'pleasing' to the male gaze! Troubled by contemporary arts tendency to celebrate the death of nature e.g. Damien Hirst's work, Monica talks about how her awareness of matriarchal ancient cultures existing pre-patriarchy, has prevented her, quite literally, from going insane.

1974 saw Monica contacted by the Swedish artist Anna Sjudahl, via Anna-lena Lindlberg a feminist art historian who had written an article on the exhibition at Swiss Cottage Library that was published back in Sweden. This resulted in Anna Sjudahl inviting Monica to a joint exhibition in Sweden; Anna was already known for her 'realist' figurative art, which had caused similar outrage to Monica's work. In 1974 there was the struggle of getting funding to get her art work (30 large paintings on hardboard) to Sweden. Through a contact she had made back in the 1960's with a man from the Swedish Consulate her work went overseas along with a kind donation of £200 from a good friend.

Monica was also very involved with the Gay Women's Group, still working closely with Dale. Whilst acknowledging that she went through a separatist phase herself, she reflects that separatist women became hostile and aggressive, alienating a lot of

women within the Women's Centre and Movement. Monica remembers a workshop at a women's camp where she was told to leave her three sons, that giving birth to sons was somehow 'wrong', effectively insinuating a punitive edge to bearing sons. Monica, still ever busy and active, distanced herself from this section of the Movement. Monica says that it is not possible to create a large women's movement if one sees heterosexual women as "the enemy" because they relate to men or have sons. Men are not born patriarchs, they are made so.

In 1978 there were two major events in Monica's life. A trip to Silbury Hill and Avebury, whilst on sacred mushrooms, had huge impact on her. Feeling she had entered an alternative reality, feeling the pain of Mother Earth and a great love also, she was inspired to complete her painting "Goddess of Silbury & Avebury". She felt changed by this, and her paintings changed; it was the biggest impact on her work and life since the experience of natural childbirth in 1961. Needing to get away from the city, Monica moved to Fishguard, creating many of her major works there. Involving herself with local anti-nuclear demonstrations, she carried the inspiration from Avebury to create a women artists' exhibition. In 1978 Monica and three other women put together Woman Magic Exhibition; the focus of the exhibition was celebrating the Goddess within us all. This exhibition containing most of Monica's major work, continued travelling for nine years, and was shown in nine different cities in the UK alone. Monica attended the Milky Way Club in Amsterdam, for the women's festival. These festivals were on a huge scale, Monica remembers "I saw outrageous stuff", and sold prints and posters of her work.

In 1981 Monica was invited to give a talk "Matri-Anarchy on the Ancient Goddess Cultures" at a conference of ecologists in Denmark. This meant she was unable to take part in the first Greenham March. (She had been invited to attend this march by her friend Ann Pettitt who lived in Wales.) From the Denmark talk came the offer plus money to buy a van, to take the Woman Magic exhibition over there. The exhibition grew in size again and in 1983 went to Denmark. Monica travelled with it to Germany, Sweden and Finland, remarkably never being stopped at customs! After being stored in Gothenburg at the Women's Folk High School for four years Monica's paintings went further north in Sweden. Her paintings became part of a travelling exhibition organised by the Women's Art Museum there. This inspired Monica to write about the Norse Goddess as she later travelled north, along with her work, into Lappland, land of the Saami people on the Arctic Circle. As always her life experiences, spirituality and activism were all linked and reflected in her art. Monica talks at length about her spirituality, her links through her art and awareness of ancient matrilineal cultures. "This is the basis of my life, understanding and my work, without this I would have gone insane". It also gives her hope as it shows that men were not always what they are now, as witnessed by the indigenous men who also love and protect Mother Earth.

Monica talks of the death, in 1985, of her young, mixed-race 15 year old son, before her oldest son was diagnosed with cancer. She talks of her retreat into "perpetual darkness" as she felt her world shut down. For two years Monica was to-and-fro to hospitals with her ill son Sean, who died aged 28. Monica talks of these tragic, painful experiences honestly. Her fear of connections and links, her ensuing fear of her spirituality and even women's groups felt a threat to her. Simply, Monica says she "felt cursed", but her anger at Sean's involvement with Rebirthing led her to read up

and research this further. The more research she completed, the more angry she became. This fuelled her to write her book *New Age Armageddon: the Goddess of the Gurus*, a feminist vision of the future (Women's Press 1992, republished in USA 1999). By the late 1980's Monica was giving talks with a new format, via the New Age Movement research she had done.

In 1989 Monica and three other artists held the Goddess Exhibition at the Assembly Rooms in Glastonbury. It was at this exhibition that Monica first met the great African-American writer Alice Walker. This was an important meeting as in 1990 Alice (who had three of Monica's paintings herself) sponsored Monica to get her work over to the Gaia bookstore gallery in Berkeley USA. Her work was part of the first women's exhibition there called "The Stones and the Goddess" exhibiting along with a male artist Christopher Castle. Whilst at a Rainbow Camp, Monica was asked by Marianna Shapland to get involved in setting up a spirituality group in Bristol. Monica agreed, this was an important shift after a substantial time out of all women's groups. The group Ama Mawu was formed combining spirituality and politics. To date this group is still running and Monica talks about various aspects and actions of the group. 1993 saw the 'Breaking The Taboos' Conference, held in May, heralding the end of patriarchy the following August. Monica talks of a Spiral Camp, where about 100 women celebrated Lammas by dancing on Silbury Hill; although she was not able to be there, "it happened". On reflection it felt that second wave feminism didn't apply, "we felt like the third wave, the end of patriarchy was nigh".

Since 1994 Monica has spent a lot of time in the States, often through her connections through Zsuzsanna Budapest. Zsuzsanna organises the biannual international Goddess conferences in California. Monica has taken part in these since 1994. Monica's book *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*, co-written with Barbara Mor (1987/91 Harper SF) is very well-known in the USA, and considered by many women to be a "bible"! Through all her travels Monica experienced meeting many amazing women that have led to countless fruitful connections.

More recently Monica was diagnosed with breast cancer, and says how supported she felt by Kathy Jones's book *Hanging on by a Red Thread*, (Kathy herself having suffered the same form of cancer). Monica has also continued to write for *From the Flames*, for a period of about 10 years now. *From the Flames* is a women's spirituality and politics journal which came to an end in 2000. After treatment for her cancer, Monica travelled to Malta to try and recapture her creative energy, that radiotherapy had drained from her. Her interview ends with her talking about how she was able to regain her creativity there, and leave behind two small images that ended up in an International Goddess Art Exhibition on Malta. A recent trip to Russia saw Monica attending a conference on threatened forests of the Siberian Jalga. As she states, "there is still warfare on Earth, Her waters and dark spaces".

Monica's interview is over three disks, and gives a very detailed and personal account of her life, work and involvement in the Movement. What runs through this is the amazing number of encounters, and unusual connections Monica has made with other women. A pivotal point in Monica's active political/spiritual life was storming Bristol Cathedral with 15 other women (during the "Breaking the Taboos/Silence" held in Bristol) and interrupting a mass. Waiting 30 years to do this, scared of committing

the 'ultimate taboo', she remembers vividly the experience, and afterwards the celebrational dancing to drums that went on "for hours". "We felt we had changed and made an opening in women's collective consciousness, it felt incredibly important". Monica recalls this as "a great liberatory experience". At present she still takes part in giving major speeches and exhibiting at the Glastonbury Goddess conferences (organised by Kathy Jones and Tyna Redpath). Since this interview Monica has founded another women's spirituality and direct action group in Bristol.

Interviewed by Viv Honeybourne

HELEN TAYLOR



Helen Taylor is currently the Head of the School of English at Exeter University. Her main feminist involvements have been: 'Half the Sky' Collective, Women's Studies and Women's Literature courses, 'Sistershow', National Organisation of Women (NOW), and consciousness-raising groups.

Helen was born in 1947. She describes her family as occupying an 'ambivalent' class position in that her father was a salesman and her mother was initially a housewife but in later life trained as a teacher. Neither of her parents had attended university but they sent Helen and her brother to good schools in Birmingham from where they both went on to higher education. Helen regards her mother as being a very strong woman who was somewhat frustrated by the limited opportunities available to her; "She wouldn't exactly call herself a feminist but as a wife and mother she lived through the period of the 1950's when women were supposed to be housewives and there was no equal pay and no training. Indeed, in her teens she had to leave school to get a job because her sister's medical bills had to be paid (pre-NHS) and so she had to give up a scholarship. She always regretted not being able to go to college." Her mother's situation had a strong impact on Helen. She cites it as one of the reasons why she has chosen not to have children or get married, although she has lived happily with a male partner for many years. Seeing her own mother being frustrated and stifled in her own life is one of the main reasons why she became attracted to the Women's Movement. She also cites the experience of attending a girls' school as contributing to her commitment to feminism; "I think there's a generation of women who went to girls' schools in the 50's and 60's who were taken very seriously indeed [in school] because they were taught by the sort of women we now caricature. The sort of woman who claimed that her fiancée had been killed in the war and so threw herself into teaching. A Miss Brodie type figure. They were the only intellectual women we knew and on the whole they were very dowdy... because they had been desexualised ... they were spinsters and there was no role model for single women at the time." Helen feels that; "...those women at least gave us a model for being intellectual and having a sense of seriousness about us which mattered. When we came out of school or left university we found that the world didn't see women like that and women were supposed to be ornamental and not be taken seriously." Helen felt that growing up in the 1950's and 60's was a difficult time for women as they were generally not encouraged to be intellectual or independent; "I felt it a great struggle to be accepted as a thinking person and I did find that my relationships with men were always getting me into trouble! Also there wasn't much feminist solidarity as there was a sense that women were all competing for men and so our friendships were rather contingent on that." Helen describes the possibilities of intense female friendships and lesbian

relationships as being a 'revelation' that she only found out about through the women's movement.

Helen went to university in London where she read English Literature. In 1969-71 she did a Masters Degree in Louisiana, where she became involved in politics and early feminist campaigns. Helen reflects on the fact that this was an unlikely setting for her politicisation; "Not many women can say they became socialist feminists in Baton Rouge, Louisiana but that is true of me!" She joined the National Organisation for Women (NOW) and went to the second national conference where she felt inspired and excited by the company of other women and the freedom they had to openly discuss their lives and feelings. Around this time she also read *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan which she now regards as a pivotal moment in her development as a feminist; "There are very few books I've read right through the night in my life. I like my sleep, but I read that right through the night and I remember weeping solidly for about 3 hours after I had read it with complete recognition of everything she had said about the ways in which I had internalised being female, feminine, second class. The ways in which my horizons had been limited by being born a woman".

When Helen left Louisiana she went to London where she worked as a PA in a publishing company. She became involved in the beginning of women's publishing. She met Carmen Calil and Ursula Owen (instigators of the Virago publishing company) and discussed feminist publishing. She went on to edit *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin for The Women's Press which was one of their first publications. She also edited a collection of short stories by Kate Chopin and regards this involvement as being a very exciting one which she would have liked to have continued. Helen then moved to Bristol to teach Liberal Studies, then English, at the Polytechnic (now the University of the West of England). She introduced women's writing courses which met with much opposition from male academics who thought that there was no need to study women's writing on its own. She was encouraged by Liz Bird who was working for the Extra-mural Studies Department at Bristol University, and was co-ordinating women's studies courses around the South West. Helen taught women's writing day schools and afternoon courses in a variety of locations and they were all extremely popular. The first of these courses that she taught took place at the Folk House on Park Street in Bristol. She remembers a huge number of women attending regularly to read women's writing; "We passed round short stories and novels. It was a very exciting time where we were all pooling our knowledge, sharing new writing and seizing on the first Virago Modern Classics as soon as they came out." On one particular snowy evening just before Christmas, Helen felt sure the class would be poorly attended but everyone came including a woman who was eight and a half months pregnant who had struggled all the way up Park Street because she couldn't bare to miss an evening of the course! Helen feels that although women's studies courses are no longer as popular as they once were this is more a mark of their success than failure. She believes that some of the important ideas have permeated institutions and more 'mainstream' courses; "It's taken for granted that people read Maya Angelou on a school curriculum or that feminist sociology is part of sociology courses. Feminism is a major part of literary theory in universities." Helen regards this development as one of the great achievements of the era.

Helen also became involved in the campaign to retain Family Allowance as a payment to women and not a tax credit to their husband, as the Government were proposing. She went with Suzy Fleming to Eastville Market in Bristol and interviewed women about what the Family Allowance payment meant to them. She remembers being surprised at just how vital it was to women; "For women who didn't have an income or had a very small one... it represented their own money. Money that they could do what they liked with that they knew was always going to come to them. It was incredibly moving hearing those accounts... of how important it was to have that small amount of money under their control." She made a tape-slide of these interviews which was taken to various community groups to show how strongly women felt about this. Helen has since donated this slide and other items to the Feminist Archive. Helen was also a member of a consciousness-raising group for about five years and this led to some very intense times; "We all shared experiences with each other and learned a huge amount about professional and/or middle-class women's different lives shaped through particular class and educational histories, even if there was sometimes paranoia that women were discussing one other outside the group. A couple of the women had a lesbian relationship and that was very difficult because then they broke up... A lot of us were going through quite difficult times, including childbirth, miscarriage etc... But it was also a very happy time and I do remember some very happy evenings when we would go round to one other's houses with drink and food and it felt like a safe space to talk about how we felt about being women and the kinds of problems we were having."

Helen was also a member of the general Women's Liberation Group in Bristol. Through this involvement and her CR group she came into contact with other academics who were teaching women's studies courses and shared with them her dissatisfaction at the scant availability of women's studies texts. From these initial discussions the 'Half the Sky' collective was formed and women got together to pool resources and collect and edit the first women's studies reader - called *Half the Sky: An Introduction to Women's Studies* (Virago, 1979). . She describes the experience thus; "Working on that book was tremendous for us all because we had to decide what kinds of materials should be used in an adult education class and we all had to read each other's material. We were all bringing stuff in for each other, it was terribly exciting... we did everything collectively... It was really like a very important consciousness-raising group." She was also involved in 'Sistershow', which was originally put on as an evening event at the Bristol Polytechnic where Helen was teaching. She describes it as; "A whole evening of sketches, events, readings, poetry, dance, parodies and song". She recalls Jacky Thrupp and Pat Van Twest (now Pat West) as being totally flamboyant, outrageous and funny and she remembers the dazzling costumes that they made. Monica Sjoos did some of the paintings and the event was very multi-media. The women danced for a publicity shot on College Green wearing a T-shirt made for twelve people and a two-headed hat featured on the posters. The show was very well attended and received and Helen is very proud to have been involved; "...people were very excited... it seemed to mark a new feeling in Bristol... [which] really carried itself into other events that women did. A feeling of strong women, witty women, creative women... it wasn't that we were all po-faced and serious... we also showed that we had a wonderful creative relationship to feminist ideas."

Helen had a friend who ran a Women's Aid 'safe house' who spoke of battered women's fear of all men as a result of their experiences. On her friend's suggestion she brought some male students down to the house to play with the children and make small repairs etc... Helen cites Women's Aid as one of the most important developments of that era. "I have the greatest admiration for women who set up shelters for battered women. I didn't really have the courage or staying power to do that and I think it was a great achievement." She was also marginally involved with National Abortion Campaign (NAC) and - having grown up in a period of illegal abortion - helped to defend women's rights in this area against a series of political attacks in the 1970's and 80's. She is also proud to have been part of a feminist network of women, many of whom have high profile positions in academia or research. Helen has always tried to involve more women in education as part of her own feminist agenda and she feels that; "Being an old feminist has given me a lot of grit. Those experiences where you had to fight very hard against a lot of derision and hostility have toughened us up and I can see that in a lot of my friends". She feels that the 'old feminist network' can be useful both personally and professionally; "...there is a sort of shorthand. You understand how old boys' networks work because the old girls' network does mean that there are certain things that you don't have to say to each other." She believes the increasing number of women in parliament (although still too few) is another great achievement that owes itself to the campaigns of the 'second wave' era.

Helen believes that young women are in some ways ignorant of the battles that were fought by the Women's Liberation Movement. She is depressed when her students say there is no point in feminism; "...and you know that those women haven't thought through all sorts of areas of their lives and will have a big shock when they go out into the world and try to get jobs and try to have children and do jobs with inadequate childcare etc..." She does however believe that young women generally have a kind of 'sassiness' about them which she regards as the "birthright of feminism". She expresses it thus; "We gave them a kind of confidence, a right to be themselves and not to marry and not to have children and all the things that younger women are taking for granted now. I think they can see us as older and greyer and laugh at our pre-occupations. That's fine, it doesn't matter. But because we were there and went through all that they can be different kinds of women and very much more confident than we ever were."

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

BETTY UNDERWOOD



Betty currently still lives in Bristol; her main areas of activism were around the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign, attending General Meetings, chairing the first session at the Skegness Conference and establishing groups on the south side of the city.

Betty grew up in a professional family. Her father died in the middle of the war and left her mother a widow and the family struggled financially from then onwards. From the age of 16, Betty became more drawn to left politics and joined the Communist Party when she was 20 years old, after some amount of thought, as she wanted to ensure she was joining for her own reasons. Betty describes herself as very active in the Party and after marrying and having children she became more aware of the lack of "enlightenment" regarding women's issues within the Party. After a period of living in rented flats, Betty and her family finally got housed by the council and went to live in Knowle West, where she remained for the next 18 years. During this move she maintained contact with friends she had made with women in the Redland/Cotham areas of Bristol. It was through these women that Betty first heard about the consciousness-raising groups being held at the Women's Centre. At the first meeting Betty was shocked by the challenging nature of the meetings, everything "thrown up in the air" so it could be looked at and questioned. Betty became very involved in meetings of women and says on reflection that there were so many different ideologies that it gave strength to the women as a group. The women involved had a vast array of talents and skills and this made the group more cohesive.

One of the women (Monica Sjoo) had been asked to write an anthology [*A Woman's Right to Choose*] and had asked for a group to come together to discuss this issue. It was a pivotal moment for Betty that she describes as "fastening her in to the women's movement". Betty, along with other women, shared painful experiences of back-street abortions. This group was the forerunner that became the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign. Betty, along with the other group women, actively campaigned, lobbied anti-abortion meetings, organised and went on demonstrations. Contraceptive leaflets were devised, printed and distributed and Betty says that she found they had a lot of support given from other organisations in support of this

campaign. Betty talks about many actions, activities and influences that were inherent within this group. Poignant and fundamental to this was the "coming out" of women who had experienced "backstreet" abortions - many were famous women.

During this time Betty attended the General Meetings which she believed were a necessary space for planning and decision making to occur. Through these rose various issues and debates. Some of these proved more painful than others. Betty says that "anything could happen" during these meetings, and often did. Interestingly, it was felt that many women still found it hard to cope with being challenged, and often stepped back from the meetings when conflict arose.

Betty reflects on the Skegness conference, which was the first conference organised by the women's movement. The pre-cursor to this was the bi-monthly women's national co-ordinating committee set up at the Ruskin history weekend in March 1970 which sparked everything off. Betty was a strong believer in these meetings and always insisted that some Bristol women delegates should attend if they were able to. The feeling was that if delegates didn't attend the meetings they would be "taken over" by certain interest groups. The Skegness conference, which was held at a holiday camp, was difficult to organise as there wasn't the technology that we now take for granted - copies of papers often were fewer than the women that turned up and more couldn't be printed off at short notice. Four women had volunteered to share the chairing of the conference: a woman from the Maoist group, Catherine Hall, Ellen Malos and Betty. Catherine was not able to chair the first session due to having to settle her young child in the crèche. Betty found herself having to chair the first session as the other two women were not able to. The conference became very tense. Many women had left before the conference started and found another venue to discuss their desire to be more involved in the running of the conference. Betty decided to carry on and chair the first meeting of the conference despite women still arriving and general confusion about what was happening. Ellen Malos chaired the afternoon session at which most of the women were present. This became a tempestuous discussion as to the way forward for the conference. This ended in physical aggression and was felt to be exacerbated by men being present and having too much to say. The men were thrown out and after that they were banned from the WLM. Betty says that she is very proud that she had managed to chair this particular conference.

In 1975 Betty tried on many occasions to set up women's groups in the south side of Bristol. Specific campaigns were so relevant to these women's lives but the media were giving the women's movement such "awful press" at this time, it was possible that this stopped many women from becoming involved. Women would get involved over specific issues/campaigns, but would not stay with the group once these issues were addressed. Somehow these women were not mobilised into joining the women's movement. On reflection about achievement gained at this time, Betty feels that we maybe take things for granted now, but that at this pivotal time there were huge contributions to women's thinking. "Academic women still defend that this movement exists, no, it doesn't, but rightly they call it a body of ideas, which is a good thing". Reflectively it feels that the diversities of women/thought/skills/ideas that gave the movement strength initially, also eventually led to its demise. "Too many divisions", and "lesbianism as a solution to liberation narrows a movement, so makes it difficult to be a mass movement". As Betty draws attention to, there were no

national structures or programmes, "so how could the movement live through decades when there was nothing to pass down, we needed proper policies and programmes to encompass various women".

On a personal level, Betty found that the movement fell apart at a time when she really needed her 'sisters'. As her marriage ended, the women weren't there for her. In late 1980 Betty then became very actively involved in her union as a workplace steward and later on regional and national committees. She discovered many women within her union had been active in the WLM.

Betty still firmly believes in the demands of the women's movement, but feels they were slogans, not worked-out demands and that the reality of them was that they became more complicated. In conclusion "I wouldn't have missed it for the world, it was a very important phase of my life and I am lucky to have lived at that time".

Interviewed by Viv Honeybourne

DALE WAKEFIELD



Dale presently still lives in Bristol; her activism centered around the Gay Women's Group at the Women's Centre, attending the Lesbian Conference (Bristol 1976), being a part of creating the magazine *Move* and being involved in setting up the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard (running it from her house for the first 5 years).

Dale was born in the Second World War and says that her father was always very encouraging towards her. Dale was a bright child and her father never let the fact that she was a girl hinder her in any way. At school Dale faced coming up against the confines of "being a girl", feeling the injustice and unfairness of this. Dale later married and had a daughter. On the break-up of her marriage she once again faced the unfairness of being a woman; hire purchase refused to her unless she had a man's signature upon it. Dale worked in an insurance company, and outside of work became treasurer of the Communist Party, "I met really wonderful women, an exciting time, people who 'think' ". Dale talks about the witch-hunting that went on with Maoists, and although she didn't agree with them, she strongly believed and still does, that it is fruitful to argue things through and to agree that people can differ. Other influences/experiences around the late 60's and early 1970's were not gaining a job she was well qualified for because she was a woman (this was prior to the Sex Discrimination Act) and reading the *Female Eunuch*. 1971 saw lesbians stopped from being able to marry legally. Around this time Dale attended the May Day March and became aware of the feminist movement in Bristol.

Dale went on to train as a prison officer in London. At this time Dale fell in love with a woman. She says "I was shocked and didn't know what to do". On returning to Bristol, she found difficulty engaging with a gay/lesbian group, due mainly to shift-work restrictions. Dale eventually discovered appropriate resources but it was on the next May Day march that Dale met Monica Sjoo. Through this meeting Dale discovered the Gay Women's Group at the Women's Centre ("you couldn't use the term lesbian then"). By this time Dale was active within work, addressing women's right issues, she says "without really being aware of it". Initially activities in the Gay Women's Group predominantly focussed on encouraging other women to join. The participating women decided to write and distribute a newsletter. This received such

a positive feedback that it became the magazine *Move*. This was a pivotal point for Dale. She says about *Move*, "It felt like giving birth to a child".

Frustration set in when very few women's groups from within the movement came to meetings to share their activities. On reflection Dale feels there was a split of 'political' lesbians, who totally rejected men, and lesbian women who didn't want to be a political manifesto, simply wanted to be loved. These two viewpoints became increasingly polarised, and women within the movement who weren't lesbian, may have felt as if they were traitors for having relationships with men. The Gay Women's Group attracted big numbers and proved very successful. The monthly magazine was published on a world-wide basis, and actually sold more copies outside of Bristol. The Lesbian/Gay Switchboard was born out of the Women's Group. Dale recalls that they used to get so many calls from gay women and men that they set up the switchboard. This operated from Dale's house, and after 5 years moved onto the then newly-establishing centre for gay men and women. 1976 was the Lesbian Conference, held in Bristol, which Dale describes as "going pear-shaped". The conference was a catalyst for already brewing tensions between different groups within the movement. The numbers proved to be three times more than usual, and "there was a lot of crying, yelling and screaming". Huge arguments in the day escalated into physical violence in the evening, which left upset and distress with many women and local people. Tensions continued with the group Wages For Housework, attending the Gay Women's Group. Dale recollects their agenda as "bringing everything around to their perspective". The eventual outcome was that many women felt this particular group extreme and overbearing and they were voted out of the Women's Centre. Dale spoke out at this meeting and remembers it being "fun, but weird".

Separatists started to attend the meetings, and Dale felt they had an 'attitude', not a perspective. Their style of ideology was "there is only one truth" and this killed off space for debate, "which is good for growing and learning". On reflection, Dale feels this was where the women's movement fell down; it was good at choice, until it hit an ideology. Women had these specific ideologies but Dale is doubtful that the impact and outcome of these ideologies were carefully thought through. Not enough time went into understanding, ideologies were constructed and then deconstructed. "I have never been part of an 'ism', they all come and go. Then they are deconstructed and intellectualised, and all get more complex". Dale feels she understood the first round of 'butch and fem' but now, she "can't keep up with it all".

The Gay Women's Group was "a real success, it extended from the 60's into the 70's, we kept optimistic and this carried us into the Thatcher years". Dale reflects that there was so much hope and optimism at this time, wonders now if this was a good or bad thing. New style feminism appears to Dale to be based on "individualism and selfishness". Considering society now, she is disillusioned by how selfish society has become, and hopes that pockets of old style feminism can be resumed if the political climate changes to enable this to happen. Looking back on this period of time, Dale adds "we were on the crest of a wave, but didn't know it was coming down".

Interviewed by Viv Honeybourne

JACKIE WEST



Jackie is currently a sociology lecturer at Bristol University; her main areas of activism were around the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign, Women's Study Group and ensuing publication of *Half the Sky*, extra mural programme focusing on women's issues and being part of the Marxist reading group at the university. Her academic work and personal interest at that time also followed a similar pattern, looking at women and employment, women and education and women in the labour movement/unions.

Jackie describes herself as having a very middle-class upbringing, she was the eldest child and her parents were committed to education. Jackie did well at boarding school, going on to study sociology at Exeter University. After gaining a taught Masters, Jackie attained a lecturer's post at Bristol University; she could have gone to Lancaster but stayed in Bristol due to a relationship that she describes as "disastrous". Jackie was the first woman appointed in the Sociology Department, and started teaching Gender and Society. In about 1972/73 Jackie was acquainted with, through social circles, women who were pioneers of the women's movement. Through knowing these women Jackie attended her first consciousness-raising meeting. Feeling more drawn to some kind of political involvement, Jackie joined the Marxist reading group at the university, along with other women who were part of the women's movement at this time. "We saw ourselves as socialist feminists, people I knew socially had association with academia".

In 1973 Jackie went to the Women's Liberation Conference in Birmingham; the conference was full of controversy, and rather strained. This strain was underpinned by the group, Wages for Housework; there was already some controversy over this group back in Bristol. In 1974 Jackie attended a group about women in unions, taking the opportunity to work with working class women, thus moving away from "theorising" about them. This was already a field of interest for Jackie, who had been studying women working in the tobacco factories in Bristol. The women organised a Working Conference in a community centre in St Werburghs, which was big and well attended. Jackie's ever-developing interest in work & employment, labour movement and women in education led her to become involved in contributing to an extra mural

programme. This ran a series of day schools and programmes all around women's issues. This was based at the Folk House in Bristol.

Jackie talks frankly about her experience of having an abortion, which she states as "positive, with no nasty experiences, civilised and quick, very untraumatic". This experience led her to almost immediate involvement in the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign (WACC). This particular time period saw the controversy around the 1967 Abortion Act. Jackie's involvement with WACC was more substantial and consistent than with any other group she was involved in. Active campaigning ensued, including women 'coming out' about their experiences of 'backstreet' abortions. Jackie's own experience and subsequent experiences of women's 'backstreet' abortions, kept this commitment going. WACC successfully mobilised thousands of women. Women who had never been politically active before, participated in marches and anti-abortionists got little support in light of these massive numbers. Jackie felt, and still feels, that many of these bills didn't succeed due to being overly ambitious and complex. (She cites the Alton Bill, for example, which was successfully passed in 1981, as it focused on time alone). Jackie states "you can only change laws one bill at a time". WACC was underpinned by a deep commitment to being pro-choice, the right for early safe abortion if chosen. The National Abortion Campaign politicised the issue more, and Jackie speculates its roots were more influenced by the left/Trotsky politics, as opposed to WACC's woman-centred perspective. Jackie was involved in pregnancy testing at the women's centre, and the TV programme that advertised this. Associations with staff from Brook Clinic led to her being appointed on to the executive committee and led to schools visits to talk about abortion. She "never felt unhappy about this" and did a lot of "bloody hard work" to get out newsletters on antiquated equipment. She also attended the co-ordinators group meeting in London. Involvement in WACC over a period of time, gradually "fizzled out".

1977 was a very busy year and full of change for Jackie. She gave birth to her first child whilst still being involved in a women's studies group. Many of these women in the study group were pregnant within the same year/year after and all the women became acutely more aware of childcare issues. The women's studies group decided to collectively produce a book, each women assuming responsibility for their 'own' chapter. The book was published in 1978 [*Half the Sky*] and the whole ethos and production was achieved collectively. This time was "very exciting and stressful" although within academia the book was thought of as "editing" not "proper research", possibly due to the unorthodox way it was produced. Conflicts began in the movement with divisions, the Wages for Housework controversy heightened, "it wasn't all rosy", and there was a very fraught Bristol National Conference that ended in fighting. The meetings were full of diverse women and later "feminist politics divided us in the 1980's". What feels relevant for Jackie now, is primarily that she has made a career out of it, all the publications she has achieved on subjects ranging from women and gender to prostitute collectives. Jackie states that she's not politically active now and hasn't been for years. On reflection of her 'active' period, she remembers the shared support, shared child-care, the university nursery she helped set up and the good feelings that accompanied this.

In 1982 her second child was born, this was hugely influential. Jackie recalls a lot of fun and shared experience following the birth of her child. The support of other

women, the ability and importance of child care sharing, the university nursery now being accessible, all these issues were deeply acknowledged. Jackie states this was due to the success of the women's movement - "we didn't take it for granted and we understood it was exceptional".

Interviewed by Viv Honeybourne

PAT VT WEST



Pat currently still lives in Bristol; her main areas of activism were around Sistershow, evolving out of 'happenings' which were a kind of feminist "guerilla warfare", one-woman feminist performances, giving evidence at the Hinkley Point Enquiry, establishing a women-only performance poetry yurt at Glastonbury Festival and night-watches at Greenham Common. Presently Pat still devises and performs feminist pieces.

Pat came to Bristol in 1967 as a school teacher and as a divorced single-parent with an eight-year-old son. She had "high hopes" of education, as the Bristol Education Authority had a very good press at the time. After bumping into a poet in a café and being introduced, she became involved with a poetry group, doing her first reading in The Old Duke pub. In her last teaching post as a village school-mistress Pat describes herself as a "hothead with revolutionary ideas", this led to her feeling a distinct lack of support and ended with her "leaving teaching forever".

Later, in Bristol, Pat became part of a group called Hydrogen Jukebox and took part in performance poetry. The Arts Council funded St. Ives Festival in 1970 and this was an influential experience for Pat, "it was wild and full of hippies and artists". This time was exciting and innovative with outrageous poetry shows. This was also where Pat first set eyes on Jackie Thrupp, with whom she later both influenced the formation of, and performed together in, Sistershow. Pat describes this experience at the festival as a huge turning point, it was "both influential and unique" and she came back to Bristol a "changed woman".

On returning to Bristol, Pat heard from a friend about the meetings at Ellen Malos' flat, where the Bristol Women's Centre eventually had its beginnings. On reflection Pat recalls that "it was hard to find the language, we didn't know how to give voice to what we were feeling". The magazine *Enough* was formed, to broaden the issues raised by booklets such as *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* and *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*.

Pat attended the National Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College. It was the first time women had been permitted in the Oxford Debating Hall. She says "a raggle-taggle group of us went from Bristol". Both this conference and the

demonstration in Oxford St were highly influential; the seriousness of the Movement was known and acknowledged. In light of, and in reaction to this serious orthodoxy, Pat and Jackie began to do 'happenings'. They turned up to the Acton Women's Conference both dressed 'in drag'. Initially they were turned away. This first reaction to them was the pivotal point of the 'happening'. Pat retells more 'happenings', drawing attention to the point that "you didn't have to dress in dungarees to be a feminist". She remembers that they were very disruptive, often appearing at meetings and sometimes throwing in leaflets, continuing this "feminist guerilla warfare", always questioning gender and gender stereotypes, redefining themselves. From such thought-provoking 'happenings' evolved Sistersshow. To Pat and Jackie theatre was the way forward. The first two Sistersshows involved many different women, poets, performers, jazz singers to name but a few. These free shows drew men and women from diverse backgrounds "in droves". A much-remembered show was performed in the evening of the Bristol Women's Liberation Conference at the Anson Rooms the following year. This is described as "mind-blowing, it was wild and women were making love on the dance floor". Pat recalls that after the seriousness of the conference came "an orgy laid at the feet of Sistersshow". There developed problems within the members of Sistersshow that finally resulted in Pat leaving and going on to create her own one-woman shows. Pat remembers her first solo show, at Edinburgh, and how nervous she felt. With encouragement she performed and went on to do many more.

Pat gave evidence at Hinkley Enquiry, this was a 'stand-up comic piece'. Pat had strong anti-nuclear beliefs and turned her performance skills to creating a 'piece' especially for this. As a dithery ordinary woman, Pat, in character as Mrs West, nervously gave her carefully-written evidence. Despite playing it straight, Pat remembers people seeing the irony of it and beginning to laugh, although the Chairman berated them for laughing and Pat left to "riotous applause". Pat went on to many performances like this. As she states, "playing characters allows you to be outrageous". At this time Pat was still part of a poetry group Riff-Raff poets (formed and born out of St Ives Festival) and was asked to set up a Poetry Yurt at Glastonbury Festival. This became a big regular 3-day event and the only women-only performance space in the Festival.

In 1975 Pat's second son was born. She says she withdrew into motherhood but "the idyllic evaded me". She emerged to protest at Greenham Common and did subsequent night-watches in the early 1980's at Orange Gate. From 1983 Pat's attention was directed to writing a novel which took her through a three-year period. After this she set up writing workshops for the Bristol One Parent Project. This resulted in a book *The Dinner Lady and Other Women*. In 1992 Pat also set up Rive Gauche poetry group, edited *The Rive Gauche Anthology* in 1997 and continues on-and-off with this group. She remains a Creative Writing Tutor for Community Education, where her Women's Writing Classes continue. Pat still devises/performs feminist pieces.

On reflection Pat feels that "we irritated other women, our flippancy, lack of rigour". Pat says that women had been held back for so long that when the lid was taken off, there was an explosion! "We were challenging all the time" and recalls many "creative outbursts". Pat is unsure that the 'Spice girl'-type girl/woman is quite what they envisaged but she states "women is the experience and experiences have

changed". Pat concludes her interview with a statement, very much in line with her feminism "which has never stopped developing in order to break even newer ground".

Interviewed by Viv Honeybourne

HARRIET WORDSWORTH

Harriet currently lives in Bristol; her main areas of activism focused on attending the first Women's Liberation Conference (Oxford 1970), attending the Bristol Women's Liberation Conference, being part of the Women's Marxist Reading Group, joining the Working Women's Charter, involvement in the National Abortion Campaign and attending the International Socialist Feminist Conference in Paris.

Harriet grew up with her parents and four brothers, and feels that if her mother had been a feminist she would have left Harriet's father. On reflection Harriet feels that the relationship between her parents led her to realise in later years, how things could be changed for the better for women. This allowed her to realise that feminism made sense. Harriet left home at 17 years old and was given *The Second Sex* to read. This she found shocking but started her on the path that would eventually lead her to becoming a feminist. In the early 1960's Harriet went to Bristol University to study English. She found herself quite isolated in her way of thinking, although she continued to read and consolidate her increasingly feminist style thoughts.

In 1970 Harriet attended the first Women's Liberation Conference at Oxford and found herself amongst like-minded women, many of who were heavily political (Maoist and Marxists). The following year found Harriet in Africa for a year; a pivotal time for her, as she returned from this experience "knowing" she was a feminist. During this year she had lived with a Shanti tribe in Ghana and was greatly effected by their matrilineal culture and their ability to work collectively. On her return to Bristol in 1972, Harriet found the Women's Movement well established and under way. She attended a Women's Conference at Bristol Students Union, this was followed by a "wild" evening event, largely facilitated by Sistersshow. Both the conference and the evening show proved influential, and from then on Harriet became involved in the Women's Centre. True to her socialist feminist beliefs Harriet attended a women's Marxist reading group at Bristol University, whilst also attending the Women's Centre and doing "slots" there. Harriet particularly remembers being on duty when the Centre was raided, describing the experience as "dire". She also stresses the importance of the Centre offering pregnancy testing.

Around 1974 Harriet joined the Women's Working Charter, this was the same year as her son was born. Living in a shared house allowed her to share childcare and sustain her activism. Harriet also speaks about her feelings about Wages for Housework being "thrown out" from the Women's Centre. This was a controversial time as the majority of women voted this group out. Harriet feels proud that she voiced her opinions despite knowing the majority of women didn't agree with her. From then Harriet moved on to various socialist feminist groups, all of which she found very inspiring. Around this time Harriet was involved in the International Women's Day (before it was held at the Council House). Harriet speaks about her active involvement in the National Abortion Campaign. Reflecting on the Abortion Campaign, Harriet feels that women's expectations have changed since then. Women have a different attitude to themselves, childcare and the choices available in both contraception and abortion facilities. In 1978 Harriet attended the International Socialist Feminist Conference in Paris and particularly remembers hearing African women talking about

their experiences of genital mutilation and the issues that arose from that. This experience Harriet describes as being very influential and that she felt very privileged to be there. After this Harriet joined the Women's Commission and was involved in many conferences addressing women's issues. She later joined the Labour Party when she left the Women's Centre.

On reflection of this time of her life, Harriet says "I miss it, it was part of my formative years, the social life, regular groups and meetings. It's a loss". Harriet feels the achievement gained by the Women's Movement is an ideological one "Women have grown to think about themselves in a different way and won't put up with quite so much shit from men. Women are more likely to be self-reliant and get the men to do the chores at home!"

Interviewed by Viv Honeybourne

FEMINIST ARCHIVE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, VOLUME TWO

FOREWORD BY ILONA SINGER

'If you don't archive it, it slips out of history' (Pen Dalton, Oral History Project Interviewee, 2002).

When sitting down to write this, I was initially struck by 'writers block' associated with a feeling that by writing any kind of overview I would somehow be rendering my thoughts and feelings more important than those of the interviewees. I also felt that as we have now compiled nearly forty interviews with women of the 'second wave', heard about their diverse lives, activities and interests and the myriad ways in which they were shaped by and yet managed to resist patriarchy, what more was there to say?

With regard to my first misgiving, I feel it is relevant to add that the reflexivity of the researcher is part of the process of doing the interviews. I know from chatting with my co-workers Viv and Romy that we have all been interested, challenged and changed by the process of doing the project and talking to the interviewees. In a sense history was not just recounted during the interview but our own histories have been influenced by the encounters and the forms of 'consciousness raising' we experienced. As part of this reflexivity, we allowed the interviewees to edit or re-write the interview text after a draft was submitted to them. I am aware that research-wise this is highly problematic, but felt that it was of paramount importance to give the interviewees control over how they were represented. The right to self-definition is after all is one of the tenets of the women's liberation movement.

The process of allowing interviewees to re-edit sometimes makes the text appear disjointed, messy even. However history itself is messy, constructed in a non-linear narrative, especially where painful or highly charged memories are evoked. These aspects of women's experience are often dismissed or marginalised rendering some forms of 'women's' history sterile sounding. I am glad that for all the 'messiness' of some of these accounts they are candid, interesting and inspiring and would I feel have been less so if we had made more traditional journalistic accounts. Also the notion of history (or should it be 'herstory'?) is problematic in itself. It suggests a finish, an end point, looking back on a past heyday. As some of my interviewees pointed out, history is never finished. It is an ongoing project that is hardly linear. These interviews are in some sense history in and of themselves in that they are constructions of women's lives and experiences permeated with the hopes and fears of the present.

Many women expressed an anxiety about the future of feminism, about fears of a 'backlash' or a slide into postmodern relativism where it becomes just another 'ism' without the bite of a political movement. I want to reassure them from my own experiences that campaigns around women's liberation issues (though submerged) are far from dead and are forever sprouting new shoots. For example the 'Ladyfest' movement which is a celebration of women's activism and creativity. I believe it is

vital that today's generation of feminists are able to access the lives and achievements of their sisters before them and the oral history projects have been one important way of forging this link.

On reflection, I feel my initial misgivings were just wrong. Every woman's story is unique and there are many different ways to experience and resist patriarchy. Above all then, there is so much left to tell and so much left to change...

ILONA SINGER, 2003

I would like to thank Jane Hargreaves (the Archive Manager), for her unwavering patience and support; my partner Al for all his help; and most of all the interviewees (for both of the projects) who inspired me, educated me and above all trusted me with their life stories; in particular Jilly Rosser who showed me that reclaiming birth from the patriarchal, obstetric model of 'care' is an urgent project that strikes right at the heart of the feminist enterprise. (There is still so much left to change...!)

JACKIE BARRON



Jackie currently works part-time as a project worker for Women's Aid at their national office in Bristol and part-time as a relief worker with adults with Asperger's syndrome and "challenging behaviour". She has a longstanding involvement with Women's Aid both at the national office and in the local Bristol refuge. She was involved with the Bristol Women's Centre and with other women's liberation groups and campaigns around issues of women's legal and economic inequality and also helped to organise a Women and Economics conference at Bristol University.

Jackie was born in Watford in 1943. She lived with her mother and grandparents until her father returned from being in the second world war. She recalls that she had feelings about equality quite early on: "... even when I was a little child I was always determined that I was not going to be any different to boys... I did actually feel that I was equal to boys but I used to get told by my great aunt 'it's a pity you weren't a boy because you won't carry on the family name' and I'd say 'why can't I carry on the family name?' and she would say 'girls don't do that.' I invented a brother that had died before I was born or maybe a twin brother because I definitely felt I was [considered] second class because I was female even when I was a child." Jackie went to the local primary school and on to a girls' grammar school where she did well in her O levels but was discouraged from continuing her education due to her family's attitude: "My parents didn't approve of higher education for girls. They thought it was wasted because they got married. I could have stayed on to do A levels but I didn't see the point of doing A levels if I couldn't go to university and also the A levels the school wanted me to do were not the ones I wanted to do". So Jackie left school at age sixteen and worked as a library assistant.

Jackie married at age nineteen (to one of the borrowers in the library where she worked) and by twenty-five she had four small children. Jackie feels that at this stage she began to question the impact her upbringing had on her expectations of life and her early feelings of discrimination were re-awakened: "... because I'd been brought up to think that marriage was what women did, I hadn't really thought about doing

much else. But once I did get married I found that I didn't actually like the assumptions...that you were responsible for the children and the cooking and the house and everything else [and that] if your husband did anything it was for you; and the assumption that he would automatically stay at work and work as many hours as he always did, even when you had children together; and he was doing that for you." Jackie was unhappy with these assumptions and the repercussions they had on her life with her four small children but she points out that she felt very alone with these ideas: "Where I was living which was Luton at the time, there was no-one who seemed to think the way I did. This was early to mid 1960's so there was no writing about it or anything...there might have been some academic stuff, there was Simone de Beauvoir, but I hadn't actually come in contact with that. There was ... no ordinary writing like that." There also was no organised women's movement for Jackie to join at that time; but then she read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* - as soon as it was available in England - which made a great deal of sense to her: "I know there has been a lot of criticism of Betty Friedan's book subsequently because it was very middle class and of course it was American but it did actually chime with my experience and so at last there was someone else saying the things I was thinking so it did help quite a lot." At that time, though, her children were very young and her husband was working very long hours setting up a business, and he would often travel away for weekends and come back very late at night. The result of this for Jackie was that: "I could never reliably say that I could go out to something in the evening... I couldn't offer to baby-sit for people as a reciprocal arrangement because I could never be sure he was going to get home. I really was quite stuck with the children."

Eventually Jackie managed to commit to an evening class whilst her husband's father lived with them. It was an evening class on fiction which was taught by a man and wasn't particularly feminist but: "...for some reason at the last session one of the other women asked me if I would like to come to this women's group that she and some friends had started up in Hemel Hempstead. I'm not sure why she asked me because she didn't ask every woman in the class and I had hardly said a word in the classes... I thought 'yes, I'll go.'" For Jackie the feeling that motivated her at this stage was the "... experience of finding that being a 'housewife and mother' was actually being a second class citizen. I really did *feel* that and I wasn't a particularly educated person because I'd done O levels and then left school so it wasn't as though I wanted to go back and have a great career or anything because I hadn't got a career to do, but it was actually just feeling a second class citizen all the time, not having money of my own, not having my own time. It wasn't that I necessarily hated the things I was doing day to day...but the circumstances under which I was doing them."

Jackie describes her first women's group thus: "I felt quite out of my depth really to start with because the women who were there had got into women's liberation via socialist politics and I knew nothing about socialist politics. I had never been involved in any kind of socialist group. I actually did feel emotionally socialist but I didn't know anything about the politics of it... So I just sort of stayed quiet a lot of the time and just listened to what was going on really. Also I had this problem that when they went on demonstrations to London or to conferences I couldn't go because I didn't have anyone to leave the children with because they weren't very good about being in crèches...so I was very much on the periphery of this women's group... but it did actually feel like something I really wanted to be involved in." Around this time - the early 1970s - Jackie began to come across feminist magazines such as

Spare Rib and books about feminism were starting to be available. Jackie read avidly and she was inspired to begin A levels and later to do a degree in Contemporary Studies at what was then Hatfield Polytechnic (now the University of Hertfordshire). This was a special course that had been introduced for those with home responsibilities: all classes were held during school hours, and students had four years to complete a normal three year degree. Jackie described this as a brilliant innovation – “the only way I could have done a degree or any regular course of study at that time.”

In 1979 Jackie’s husband decided he wanted to move his business to Bristol and as Jackie had just finished her degree and her oldest daughter had finished her O levels she felt it would be a good time to move with him. She had been accepted onto a master's course at the LSE and originally intended to commute to London from Bristol for the one day a week that she needed to be there. However the LSE decided they would not accept her without a London postal address so Jackie found herself at a ‘loose end’. She had already decided that once they moved to Bristol she would become involved in feminism again and so: “as soon as the children had settled into school, I went down to the Women’s Centre which was then at The Grove, to find out what kinds of things were going on there. I started doing a rota spot at the Women’s Centre ... answering the phone between 10 and 4, telling other women about activities that were going on, about meetings, about pregnancy testing, or just facilitating a drop-in for women new to the area or lonely or who had problems and who would come in and have a cup of coffee and a chat about their lives.” Jackie points out that: “The Women’s Centre at that time was also the contact number for the Women’s Aid refuge... and that's how I got involved in Women’s Aid because I was often answering that phone as well and referring women to the refuge... Then I met the women from Women’s Aid and because I was quite free at that point all day with no commitments until the children returned home from school I started volunteering at the refuge and I worked as a voluntary refuge worker... It was moving from St Paul's out of the city at that time, so I was involved when [the new refuge] was beginning to be set up... I was a part-time worker, sometimes paid, sometimes voluntary.” Jackie also carried on working voluntarily at the Women’s Centre and attending their regular meetings, which included the monthly policy meeting and a monthly discussion meeting on feminist issues.

Jackie still found that because of lack of childcare and her husband’s long working hours it was difficult for her to get involved in all the aspects of the women’s movement. Instead she chose to put most of her effort into Women’s Aid as it was an organisation with aims which resonated with her own feelings about women’s experience. Jackie has worked for Women’s Aid in different ways since 1979 both for the Bristol organisation, as a refuge worker and later on the management committee, and for Women’s Aid national office, also based in Bristol. She describes her motivation thus: “I was very committed to giving women options to get out of bad relationships because one of the things I was experiencing was that it wasn’t very easy to get out of a relationship if you felt you needed to and if you hadn’t any independent money of your own... I was involved in the refuge movement less because of the violence element and more to help women to have choices to be independent if they wanted to be, whilst recognising that if there was emotional or physical or sexual abuse it was actually worse and you needed to get out even more so...” Jackie feels this involvement enabled her to meet many different types of women that she

wouldn't have met otherwise and it also helped her to gain confidence in her own abilities. Initially she used to go to meetings and just be silent as she felt quite uncomfortable in group situations but then in one meeting, one woman made a point of publicly criticising her for this, saying that it was intimidating for others to have to wonder what she was thinking when she never spoke! Although Jackie found this experience of being verbally attacked very distressing at the time, it was ultimately quite liberating and paradoxically enabled her to participate much more in future discussions.

Most of Jackie's feelings about the feminist movement are positive. Ultimately these experiences helped her to move on to living independently. She points out that: "It was a wonderful experience to be involved with the women's centre and all the things that were going on... although I'd been involved in Hemel Hempstead... there wasn't a women's centre, there was no refuge... There was so *much* happening in Bristol and it was really quite exciting. And I met lots of interesting women and was in touch with ideas I'd never otherwise have encountered."

During the last few years, there has been no Women's Aid refuge organisation in Bristol, but Jackie started working at national office on the national helpline, and later has undertaken specific projects, such as research on injunctions and protection orders, and collecting information on the policies and practices of health organisations. During this time she has seen changes in the way domestic violence is regarded: "...I think it's really important ... that [there have been]...changes in the law and that the options for women have changed...the first Domestic Violence Act didn't come in until 1976. The homelessness legislation included domestic violence [as a criterion of homelessness] just after that, and since then there have been further changes. ... The two major things were... the ability to get an injunction to exclude a violent person from your home and the fact that if you were living with someone violent you could claim to be homeless and not [be regarded as] intentionally homeless, and therefore you had a right to accommodation if you had children with you. So those are the two key things I think and also... it's important now that the police do take domestic violence much more seriously and don't say 'it's just a domestic' or whatever. All those things are important but at that time the first two changes were crucial. They were just beginning at the time that I got involved with Women's Aid and they were brought about during the period that I was involved in the women's movement... and it is worth celebrating that there have been those changes, even though there is still a way to go."

Apart from her work with Women's Aid, Jackie was involved in another campaign just before the 1984 general election. "I got involved in a small group that decided that we didn't want Mrs Thatcher to be elected again... we went round leafleting houses, appealing directly to women saying, do you realise that if the Conservatives get back in again... it will affect women's position economically and in various other ways?...I think it was called something like the 'Women's Equal Rights Campaign' and it was focussed around that election, but Mrs. Thatcher did get back in – so whether it did make a marginal difference I don't know..." Also in the 1980s, Jackie was involved in helping to organise a Women and Economics conference at Bristol University which she describes as "carrying on with my general theme of wanting women to be able to be independent and have their own income". The conference covered topics like employment, benefits, childcare and taxation but "unfortunately a

lot of people aren't terribly interested in things to do with money and economics and we didn't get an enormous amount of publicity because it wasn't as exciting as some of the other things." Jackie also felt very strongly about independent taxation and social security benefits for women whether they are married or not. She points out that although independent taxation did eventually come in, more recent changes involving tax credits have confused the issue: "with the new child tax credit... the two sets of earnings have to be tied up together again by the inland revenue ... [also previously] child tax credit went to the main wage earner which was usually the man and that was a retrograde step".

On the general achievements of the time, Jackie feels that the: "achievements around legal issues have always been important. There was the campaign around keeping child benefit for women which I was very committed to because again it gave women that very small bit of independence to have that little bit of money of their own that they didn't have to account for. There was also the Equal Pay and the Sex Discrimination Act which again were important as... consciousness raising I suppose... They must have made a difference but still women's pay is less than men's for equivalent jobs but I think it was important to get them on to the statute book anyway." Jackie also is pleased that "women seem to have much more confidence than they used to and they have it younger" – though unfortunately this sometimes means that having a first child can come as a shock, as it often rather suddenly limits a woman's independence and freedom.

Jackie is less sure that some of the changes have been a good thing: "There are other things that are actually depressing... there's the way in more recent years I think the feminist message has become distorted... firstly it's got distorted into "if you're a liberated woman you'll have sex with anyone ... So some women are wearing sexually very revealing clothes and going out and behaving like the wrong sort of man, drinking a lot, noisy, all those kinds of things. I think it's a pity that in some circles the message seems to have come across that the only way for women to be independent is to actually take on men's *worst* characteristics, which has become expressed in the media as ever more sexually revealing kinds of advertisements and pornography... which I think is the wrong message somehow." Jackie points out that: "It's not that I object to sexually explicit books and films but I object to the way its being done. I can't quite explain it... there was an argument at one point that any kind of erotic pictures, literature, whatever, were actually a violence against women and I think that's a bit extreme. I think it can possibly be abusive but not necessarily so, as it really depends on how the images are portrayed and whether the woman in the picture has control over herself and what she's doing..." Also she feels another distortion of feminism is that "...it seemed as if feminism was saying, which it never did say, [that] in order to be liberated, women have got to go out to work and have a career like men. A lot of people who were never really involved with feminism think that was what feminism was saying, when it was really about having *choices*; but following on from that, what has actually happened is that economically most people, whether male or female, now have to go out to work and get two sets of earnings in order to afford to live and bring up children, so it's a bit of a negative take on that really. Maybe that's because the whole economics of society has changed and we were very lucky in the seventies that actually there was some spare capacity..."

Jackie also feels there has been a bit of a backlash about women's achievements especially academic ones: "I've got no problem with giving extra help to boys and to men but I'm a bit worried that there's this sort of worry about it when girls are beginning to move ahead, because it's happened before. It used to be the case that girls got more 11 plus places than boys so they used to adjust it so ... that the same proportion of boys and girls got to grammar schools... so it worries me that as soon as girls do start moving ahead somebody thinks we ought to adjust it a bit because they shouldn't be moving so far ahead, but when boys were moving ahead nobody really minded." Jackie is also concerned that in the area of household responsibilities there haven't been enough changes: "I think it's changed a bit but it's still true from the latest surveys that women do more housework and more childcare [than men] even if they're working full time ... it looks as though it's probably not going to change that much if it hasn't changed this far." She does point out that there is a small but increasing number of 'house husbands' and that the stigma attached to this is lessening.

In terms of her general hopes for the future, Jackie feels that she'd "like gender not to be seen as a precondition all the time as it is now. It means a massive change in people's understanding of things... I'm as bad as everyone else. If a baby is born the first thing you ask is if it's a boy or girl and it affects the way you feel about that child... I think that boys who are gentle and don't get into the aggressive masculine things probably have quite a hard time of it still. Girls have always been able to be tomboys up to a point... I think it would be really good if people's gender could be seen to be as interesting or not as the fact that they've got red hair or black hair or whatever; like it's part of them but it doesn't condition whether they're going to have children or become a brain surgeon or whatever..." Jackie feels that "we've probably reached the limits of positive change a number of years ago and now we're going backwards in some areas and staying still in others and "maybe there'll be another little push in the third women's movement in - I don't know - the end of this century?"

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

JANET BREWER



Janet Brewer currently works at a College of Further Education in Bristol. Her main feminist involvements were organising and running 'Women's Books' (a mobile bookstore), and working for the Bristol Women's Centre and the Women's House Project.

Janet grew up in Exeter in a family of two brothers and a sister. She attended a girl's direct grant grammar school which she describes as: "the sort of school which expects you to go on into higher education. Then you might go into a profession or if you became a housewife and mother then you'd do something in the community. You'd be 'of service' it was that sort of expectation." Her mother, who trained as a nurse, was a full-time housewife who "looked after the four of us and my father who needed looking after." She describes her parent's marriage as: "... a very traditional 50's division of labour. My father had a very busy working life and my mother was always there, always answering the phone. Always ready with his meal by the time he came home." She feels an emphasis was placed on education for her brothers but not for herself or her sister: "... my father chose to send my brothers away to school and although I would very much have hated going away from home to school, I just noticed the difference. That was something which led me to think life was different as a woman." In terms of her background, Janet feels she: "grew up thinking that I didn't want to have that sort of life with just a home role..."

Janet went to Cambridge University in 1963 and in her third year she met her husband. After university she worked as a Research Assistant at Lancaster University and in 1967 left to get married and to move to Bristol. Janet had two children and soon found herself in the role her mother had been in, but wondering what she could do to feel less trapped and more involved in the world. She describes her situation thus: "... I ended up with two children by the time I was 26 and feeling here I am in my small house with my two children and this isn't the way I thought it would be...". In order to try to meet likeminded women, Janet joined 'The National Housewives Register' which she describes as having: "... a terrible name, but it was a very influential group, a kind of lifeline for people who found themselves at home with children, with no kind of acceptance that you might be looking for a part-time job or

that you wanted a life outside the home. It was set up absolutely for people like that to meet each other and to have a life which explored intellectual interests and which gave them something else. A number of people who were quite key in the women's movement in Bristol met that way." In particular Janet remembers the meeting in 1970 when Marilyn Porter and she first met Ellen Malos and Jan Parham. Janet started going to WLM meetings at Beverly Skinner's place. After a while she got involved with Bristol Women's Centre where she did a rota spot and did pregnancy testing.

Through the Bristol Women's Liberation Movement she began to hear about and be fascinated by what was going on in other countries, especially the USA where feminism was more developed. The group started to produce a magazine called *Enough* which contained articles and reports, as well as poetry and creative writing. Janet felt this time was very exciting as different women's magazines began to spring up from all the different women's groups both nationally and internationally. She became very interested in the books that began to be published about women and liberation issues. Janet got involved with 'Women's Books' which was an innovative mini bookshop started at the Bristol Women's Centre. 'Women's Books' also travelled to events and conferences and operated a mail order service for women interested in women's liberation who had no local bookstores or groups. Janet feels that these women, in particular people in small towns where the women's movement hadn't started, probably felt quite interested but isolated. For them, 'Women's Books' provided a vital source of information and interest. In terms of the kinds of books that were sold, Janet recalls that: "the whole range of interests which brought women together were often very diverse and sometimes even in tension... There was a lot of interest in the legal position of women... as this was before there was any equal rights legislation of any sort. *Women's Rights* (Coote and Gill, 1974) was always on the shelf... also on domestic violence... Erin Pizzey's book *Scream Quietly Or The Neighbours Will Hear* (1974) was out by that time, lots of books about women's health and sexuality, [*Our Bodies Ourselves* by The Boston Women's Health Collective, 1978 was imported as a bestseller] books about single parenthood, lesbian writing, socialist issues... Books about anthropology by Elaine Morgan and Margaret Mead". 'Women's Books' carried a large stock and proved very popular. They imported lots of books and placed bulk orders of *Spare Rib* and sometimes *Ms* magazine as this wasn't available in newsagents. She recalls that: "We stocked quite a lot of fiction as well. Writers like Fay Weldon and Doris Lessing were obviously well read. When Linda Ward was working with me she bought in quite a lot of poetry... it wasn't my thing but it was important to many women." She feels that *The Female Eunuch* (Greer, 1970), *Patriarchal Attitudes* (Figs, 1970) and *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963) were among the most important books of this period. Janet enjoyed working with 'Women's Books' and travelling to conferences, talks etc. and helping women get hold of books that could be very influential for them. In terms of the importance of books Janet says: "I can only speak for myself really, but some books just crystallised what you'd been living with. Betty Friedan is regarded as so reactionary now, but in the late sixties and early seventies 'the problem that had no name' had meaning for many people".

Janet was also involved in campaigning around the issue of domestic violence and helped with starting up the 'Women's House Project', which developed out of the Women's Centre after women began to arrive who were escaping from violent

partners. Janet describes it thus: “It was a long battle really, writing to the council, trying to find a property. There was a lot of empty property in Bristol at that time. It seemed as though it would be easy to find a house, to offer shelter and to run it but councils don’t work fast. They have to prepare reports for committees. I remember going to the Council House and talking with people in the Housing Department with Ellen [Malos]... I think the first house from the City Council must have been in Cemetery Rd. A tiny, tiny house. It was dreadful, now I think back, how many women and children would be there at one time - and they put up with it. When the house got really crowded we worked with Solon Housing Association and they found this wonderful old farmhouse out on the south edge of Bristol...there was a garden and there were sufficient rooms to accommodate quite a large number of women and children.” Janet remembers the weekly management meetings at the women’s house where “in theory the women were involved in running the house, although in practice there was a bit of a tension because the people who were responsible, the people who were the trustees and managers of the property... probably had more power in the end.” She points out that the amount of time women stayed was: “very variable, sometimes it was just a weekend and sometimes it was months and months. ... There was so much going on at once. We were working and trying to change institutions and just talking to the women about what they wanted to do...”

In terms of the general achievements of the time, Janet feels that: “There was such a lot going on. When you look back twenty years some things have changed enormously... The whole business about having greater control of your body and having contraception and abortion more widely available has made such a difference to women’s lives. I would have to put that as the most important difference ... Once you have the power to control your fertility the whole career paths and possibilities which open up went hand in hand.” She also feels there has been: “A shift in attitude and a recognition of the rights of women to have more choices.” She believes that: “... we’ve come to a point where a lot has been achieved and... lots has changed in terms of what people expect women to be able to do. ... I think the life choices women make about having children and caring for them will continue to be important and women will not put status in the eyes of the world perhaps as high as other things in their life. I’m sure that’s true of my generation of feminists who have all chosen their own individual route trying to balance work and children and all the other important things in our lives and I think that will carry on however strongly people feel about equality.”

Janet is also keen to point out that with more choice comes difficult life decisions: “... when I look at my nieces, I think there are decisions they have to make which are just as difficult as when we made them. Who are you going to live with? Which partner will you have in life, which one? When are you going to have children, if you are going to have children? There is no magic wand to wave over those problems.” Janet is proud of the achievements of the ‘second wave’ and positive about her involvement in it. However, she points out that ultimately: “... there are choices that you make in life on your own and no movement makes any difference.”

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

KAY CHAPMAN

Kay was born in London in 1960, her family moved to Blagdon in the West Country when she was 10 years old. Her parents were left-wing working class people and had been quite politically active when in London. Kay felt they toned it down when they moved, to avoid being targeted. At school in Corsham, Kay found that racism abounded. Although there were debates on this, she found that there was very little real political activity. Corsham/Blagdon were almost exclusively white areas and, anxious to get out of that environment, Kay chose to attend Bath Academy on leaving school.

At college Kay found little political activity: however when the college was faced with closure, people did find a common cause. This provoked some action and buses were organised up to Torness Nuclear Power Station (Scotland) and anti-nuclear protesting commenced. In 1981, Greenham Common “got going” and Kay and others went down for the big ‘embrace the bases’ action on Halloween. Kay was still at college at this time but visited Greenham regularly for various events. She was greatly impressed by the power that women meeting together generated. Kay continued to learn about cutting the fences with bolt cutters, painting planes and overall how to break the law. “Challenging authority, making decisions about how you were going to live your life, how camp protests/actions could effect your future, these things felt like a thrill”. Kay states how she felt entitled to be there, “We were all different ages, there were ex-magistrates, and riff-raff on the dole!” Harder elements of the Greenham experience proved to be separatism and its relationship with women’s autonomy. Questions constantly being posed were: who were the enemy? and what were we really up against? “For me it was a real first to be with women and be autonomous, I felt depressed at times by separatism, and had a hard time with that”.

Kay moved up to Manchester for a while, but missing her friends, various personal circumstances led her to move and live at Greenham. Kay lived there for six months, in fact all through the winter. Kay was very aware of the value of Greenham and of its connections to other political campaigns, connections that she wanted to strengthen. “I wanted to know more about racism, police and other movements we had read about in newsletters and papers”. The Wages for Housework campaign came to Greenham and Kay found so much of what they spoke about made resounding sense to her. They spoke of money for people/women as opposed to bombs and the military. They drew attention to women raising their kids in communities, who were not acknowledged or valued. Some women really didn’t feel the same as her about WFH and this made Kay even more curious about them. Kay recalls a time when a young single mum came to Greenham and wanted to stay. Kay literally swapped places with her, the young Mum stayed at the camp and Kay went to London to look after her children for a week!

With the political climate of Thatcherism very much in the foreground Kay chose to be more politically active in London. Kay got involved in the squat/occupation of the South London Women’s Hospital. “We gathered up and kept all the equipment and chained it up all in one ward, then we stayed in there and picketed it”. Kay continues: “a lot of women from Greenham came to help, and we all stayed there for eight months until we were evicted.” This was the same time as the Miners’ Strike was

defeated too, (miners used to stay in squat at the hospital whilst up in London fund raising). Through the Hospital occupation Kay met the women from the Kings Cross Women's Centre, where the Wages for Housework campaign was based. "It felt like it was serious, people getting to the root of things. We need money in our hands to have power to refuse abuse, over-work and slavery". In effect, that money was needed to liberate oneself.

More recently, Kay has continually been involved in the Wages for Housework campaign (since 1984/5 onwards) and at present is a mother to her 10 year old daughter (at time of interview) and eight year old foster daughter. Kay has particularly been involved in campaigns against cutting single mothers benefits, child support benefits and entitlements and is still focussing on money going to the military and industry - "as always overlooking women and communities". More recently there has been the campaign to defend women against the Child Support Agency and defending their rights to benefits. At present Kay is involved in campaigning about the Asylum Bill (again through the Women's Centre, now based at Kentish Town). She is actively promoting the benefits of asylum children attending mainstream schools, against the backdrop of a racist climate that supports keeping asylum children separated out in accommodation centres. As Kay succinctly puts it "onwards and upwards forever!"

INTERVIEWED BY VIV HONEYBOURNE

CRISTEL

Cristel is an activist who has been involved in peace campaigns, the Wages for Housework campaign and in setting up the All Nations Women's Basketball (ANWB) group in Bristol. She currently lives in London.

Cristel was born in 1950. Her mother was a German immigrant who came to Britain in 1948. Cristel's mother was doing domestic work in hotels and care homes and learning to speak English when she met Cristel's father, a Nigerian who was also learning English at the same college. Cristel reflects on the chance nature of her coming to be: "They both met up and I was the product of that liaison. I could have been born anywhere in the world really but it happened to have been Birmingham. I'm a Midlands lass." Unfortunately things were very difficult for Cristel's mother: "My mother being unmarried at that time couldn't get any welfare... They tried to persuade her to give me up for adoption before I was born and she was in fact considering that but she said I popped out with a great big smile on my face and she didn't feel she could give me up!" Cristel's father refused to pay any maintenance unless he could take Cristel and at one point they were: "... literally going underground and hiding" so that Cristel could remain with her mother. She was raised by her mother for the first two years of her life until her mother met and married Cristel's stepfather who was English. Cristel has a brother from this marriage. Cristel describes her childhood thus: "My childhood wasn't what you'd call a happy one. I didn't call it happy. I was abused by my stepfather from about the age of eight to fourteen. I was sexually abused and also [there were] beatings which my brother also suffered." Cristel describes her stepfather as being: "... a very autocratic and violent person. I think the war had brutalised him but as is often the case women and children are the victims of men who were so very badly damaged by what they do in uniform."

Cristel and her brother attended a 'posh' grammar school because her stepfather was anxious that they would both "amount to something". Cristel describes this experience: "... we would be forced to study like crazy. I was constantly rebelling against that because I wasn't any good at academic studies and all I wanted to do was play sport, which of course was a great stereotype being the only black kid in the school. Also it was a way of refusing to do exams and other work. If you came back with [sports] medals from the school that was cool. They didn't expect you to be good at maths as well!" However, Cristel suffered racism at school and she remembers seeing her careers officer who "... encouraged me to either join the army or the police. They told me I could play my sport there but what they really were saying is we need people who've gone through our education system because we can use you. That was never a route I was going down." Cristel realised that she needed to gain her O levels in order to go to Art College which she thought of as: "an escape route really from the horrors of growing up and what had happened to me..." She left home at sixteen and her stepfather was horrified by this decision and refused to support her financially. Cristel describes the result of this: "I really became independent at a very young age... at that time sixteen was quite young to leave home and be out and about. But I survived on a college grant by supplementing my income

working in factories.” For Cristel the factory work was an influential time in her life: “I think when you work in factories you get a real education of what life is like and of how people are brutalised by factory jobs and how your health gets totally affected by working in these obscene conditions day in day out. I knew I was only going to do another couple of months before I went back to college but I was working with people who were there for the rest of their lives as far as they could see. I really got an education in terms of trying to do something for myself about the conditions, joining a union, trying to get the situation changed.” For example she: “... worked in one factory where we were dipping door handles into chromic acid and all sorts of things. These guys had acid burns all the way up their arms and we were really trying to fight to get some proper Medicare on the site. Just basic things like that.”

At college in the 1960’s, Cristel was involved in student demonstrations and political activism, particularly against the Vietnam War. This campaign was particularly important to her as she had: “A personal connection, having a mate who had come to Britain who was studying at the college to avoid the draft, and also to think, well, it could be my brother if he was in the U.S. It could be any of our brothers that could be drafted up and sent to this horrendous war.” Cristel also remembers the overt racism of the time, even among the ‘left’. For example she wanted to attend a Black Panther meeting in Birmingham in the 60’s and had been excluded for “not being really black!” Cristel describes Bournville College of Art where she was studying as being full of activism and “agitation for change”, despite its being: “in the middle of nowhere really, Bournville, Cadbury, Quaker land.” After Bournville College, Cristel moved in with friends and together they decided to go travelling. Unfortunately their van broke down on the coast in Spain and they were stranded there for 6 months. She describes it as being quite a difficult time where she was: “again learning the hard way how to survive. When you don’t have any money what are you gonna do to survive? There’s no welfare. This was Spain under Franco. A very bad time to be in Spain particularly as a black woman with some white guys all of us looking like hippies... There were definitely some hard lessons to learn about surviving and I think that I came back to Britain thinking I don’t want to go through that poverty and that kind of life again.”

After having done various jobs and “dropping out” of different scenes and activities, Cristel moved to Frome in Somerset in 1974. By then she was married and with her husband and friends she moved into a house that needed renovating. Cristel was also researching the historical development of photography which had been one of her interests at art college. She was involved in developing photographs using historic techniques and began to make some money from this. However, her husband was running a sign-making company and he wanted her to join. She eventually did but regards it as “a big mistake, to work with your partner is always a big mistake.” Cristel was working sixteen hours a day and the pressure was very intense. As an escape from the stress she took up basketball. In her past, people had often suggested that she try basketball as she is: “... six foot tall and black and of course I look the business!” Not wanting to be a stereotype, Cristel had resisted but at age twenty seven she decided to try it to get some exercise and some relief from the stresses of her job and her marriage. Cristel found that she had both a talent for basketball and enjoyed it. After her marriage broke up she was invited to join the national league team. She points out that: “... it was pretty unheard of for the west country to have a national league team. Also for women to play at that level of sport was pretty unheard of as

well because first off you couldn't be professional. Women didn't get money to play sport, they still don't unless at a very high level and only in certain sports. So we were having to grub around, raise money for our team to travel all over the country and internationally as well." Cristel describes the experience of playing women's basketball: "I've played in quite a few different countries and it was a fantastic escape. [They were] a fantastic group of women who were mainly very much younger than me. I was literally like the mum on the team but we had a good time."

Unfortunately basketball was not immune to the racism which affects many sports: "There's a lot of racism in sport and most of it is really a bit invisible. [For example] it starts with referees who are calling fouls on you when you are not doing anything... So you pick up a lot more fouls and in basketball its five fouls and you are out. Also the other players target you, so injuries were a feature of a lot of my games. I actually heard one coach say to his team "take the black one out". I was the only black player on our team and in the west country then there were not a lot of black people." She points out that male referees tended not to take women's basketball as seriously as men's due to their own sexism. At one point a woman basketball player came over from the U.S. to play for the team and Cristel became very friendly with her and: "...eventually we had a relationship which blew my mind because I'd never considered a lesbian relationship as an option but then suddenly it was and a whole set of doors were opened by that very thing."

After this relationship, Cristel describes herself as "looking for something different". One night after training she got chatting to a woman who was to become her current partner. She describes the encounter: "You know how you sit down with someone and you say 'what do you do?' The first thing she said is 'I'm involved in the Wages for Housework Campaign'. It was the first time I'd ever heard those words and it was just like, yes, this is what I've been looking for all my life, wages for the work that I know I've been doing dawn till dusk that nobody else seems to think I've been doing. This is what I'm looking for. It was really one of those defining moments in your life when she explained to me what it was." Cristel began to get involved in WFH campaign both in London and in Bristol and she also became involved more generally in the women's movement in Bristol. This was all a new experience for her and: "A lot of it I didn't understand. But the first thing I really did understand about it was that there was a black women's group and that was something I needed *badly*... We are not just talking about skin colour here, we are talking about treatment, experiences, what our lives are like. It's really about being women of colour and knowing that we get treated very differently to white women and yet also knowing that a whole set of white women get the same shit as we catch. Lots of different women get treated badly. The way the campaign was organising [involved] bringing together women I would not see under any other circumstances in my life if I continued playing west country basketball or working in a small sign-making company. I met women who were on the game and open about it, women with disabilities, lesbian women, women from all sectors of society who'd had different experiences. That was what was so attractive about the campaign. It was great." Cristel went to a women's conference in Los Angeles as the conference photographer which proved to be an amazing experience: "...listening to what women were saying about their lives and thinking how could I not know this? So much in my life was being explained at this conference."

Whilst in L.A., Cristel started to think about her basketball and what it meant to her: “I thought...I’d like to have the kind of basketball that all of us can play where there isn’t this stuff going down with disgusting refereeing, where there isn’t this stuff going down with being treated differently because you are a black player or being treated differently because your ability is different.” Cristel met up with a woman who was organising the North American Network of Women Runners who was also a member of Wages for Housework and found out about organising and raising funds for such a group. She set up the ‘All Nations Women’s Basketball’ (ANWB) based at a sports centre in Easton in Bristol. Along with other women players she: “managed to get the council to pay for the court, providing a grant and to pay for childcare. With those things it was absolutely possible to have a really open initiative for women no matter what ability, no matter how old. No matter what colour...you could come and join and play. At the same time we created the space for people who wanted to have a team within the West of England League...It was really a question of trying to create a spirit for the whole group... we always worked it out that no matter what your level was you could play on that team if you wanted to... It worked, with all its kicks and its problems it worked.” However, the basketball group was not without conflict: “... at one point there was a big fight where one woman behaved very badly and... in effect accused me as co-ordinator of running ANWB as a Wages for Housework campaign cell!” Cristel was outraged by this accusation as: “All that had happened was I’d got the idea of how to do it and quite a lot of leadership in terms of where you can go for funding [from WFH]. When it came to drafting an anti-racist and anti-sexist term of reference I used the people I knew around who’d done that before. But the initiative was run by the women for the women so this accusation was really an attempt to undermine our funding. Why anybody would want to destroy a thing they were obviously getting joy out of is beyond me...” As a result of this accusation Cristel had to defend herself to the council but the group were eventually cleared. Although the ANWB were very successful, the Thatcherite cutbacks of the late 1980’s hit them hard as the sports centre they were based at was privatised and they literally lost their ‘space’. Cristel looks back on that involvement as a “mixture of successes and failures” but she is particularly proud of the enthusiasm and commitment it generated and the way they were able to tackle sexism and racism within sport: “A couple of [the women] had become good referees for example which is one way of dealing with the sexism. Train your own referees then you’ll get some fairness.”

Whilst in Bristol, Cristel also became involved in the campaign to stop the building of the proposed Hinckley C nuclear power station. The meeting to decide whether it should be built was initially to be held in rural Somerset which would have made it very inaccessible to many people, particularly as many of those who objected were mothers with small children. Cristel became involved in a campaign to move the meeting to Bristol and she went to a market in central Bristol with some other people to get a petition signed: “I remember setting up a table there and petitioning people saying ‘stop the building of Hinckley C. Come and sign the petition if you don’t want Hinckley C built on your doorstep.’” People were queuing to sign it and within... two weeks we had over 11,000 signatures. Getting on for thirteen thousand signatures is what we finally presented and we moved the powers that be to hold the enquiry in Bristol. We went round and got quite a few people who wanted to make testimony.” Cristel spoke at the meeting and talked about the impact of Windscale a nuclear power plant that leaked in the 1950’s and about what it was like being a child when

milk was withdrawn in case it was irradiated. The testimonies of Cristel and several other people (including some of the women from basketball) are published in a book called 'Refusing Nuclear Housework'. The campaign was a success: "Hinckley C was never built and I've no doubt that a big reason that Hinckley C was never built was because of the public pressure that came from mothers and others really making a big stand against another nuclear power station... Pressure does work and we know we can change things."

In the late 1980's, Cristel left Bristol to live in London, where she felt she could become more involved in campaigns and activism. Now she feels that she: "... wouldn't frankly do anything else because I really do want a different world... My partner has three daughters and I constantly think about what kind of world they're gonna raise their children in and it can't be like this. It's absolutely possible to change it." Cristel has mixed feelings about mainstream feminism: "I suppose I've never really seen myself as a feminist as such. I've never really seen that feminism has that much to offer black and immigrant women. I think that probably a lot of black women's experience is that the issues that were being addressed never included us, or if it did it was very much at a tokenistic level and never saw us globally as who we are and where we come from... if those things are ignored by feminists who are seeking particular changes in the world, what's the point?" Cristel feels that the Wages for Housework campaign always kept a global perspective. She believes that: "... we always have to look to countries in the south where there is so much more undermining of women's livelihoods and wherewithal to survive in countries like Africa and India than there are here in Britain... You can fight for certain things [in the West] but what does that mean if women are not getting water and food and are having their livelihoods taken away by globalisation...?" As part of her global outlook, Cristel is interested in the impact of new technologies on political organising and she feels that: "Those are big victories over how we were organising ten years ago... not knowing the effects of our organising and how much impact we were having 'cos that's always being kept from us. We are always being denied a clear picture of what women are doing at the forefront of movements. You wouldn't know it most of the time because men are busy hiding us as well... I'm thinking of sisters in India that drove Monsanto right out of India. Did that ever get portrayed as women doing it? No, but you know if you're connected... Within women's campaigns it's always been the priority to make women's voices heard and to make the connections that it is women in these struggles... we've still got a long way to go with our brothers in the movement to make it clear who is doing the work. When it comes to the UN statistics of women doing two thirds of the worlds work a big chunk of that work is resistance work..."

Cristel feels that despite issues of difference it is vital that women (and other oppressed groups) are able to unite in collective action. She points out that: "The state invests a lot of time and energy in keeping us apart because once we get together they know we really are a formidable force. There are movements that proved that like the poll tax protests... The difficulty is getting together because a lot of people don't want to get together because they feel they might lose something if they get together with people who are lesbians or prostitutes or whatever... Whereas in fact they have everything to gain."

Interview conducted by Viv Honeybourne and written up by Ilona Singer.

PEN DALTON



Pen Dalton lives near Totnes in Devon. She is a lecturer in art at the University of Central England in Birmingham. Her main feminist involvements have been in art practice and writing on women's art education. She has been involved with the Women's Arts Alliance, organising early women's festivals and art exhibitions, WLM conferences, CR groups, creating feminist posters and illustrations (e.g. for *Spare Rib* and for the Anti Miss World competition) helping to set up the *Feminist Art News*, Women's art groups and meetings, She has just completed a book: *The Gendering of Art Education*.

Pen Dalton was brought up in Clapham, South London and has an older brother. She remembers having - for her primary school years - a happy, uncomplicated working class childhood. Her father worked in the printing industry, which was then an exclusively male occupation. Her mother, an Irish immigrant, held a variety of catering jobs. When Pen was eleven, her mother left the family home. For some years, they completely lost touch and she did not meet her mother again until she was in her twenties. Her father had been an alcoholic and she saw little of him at home as he spent most of his time at work. She was often with her maternal grandmother who lived on the same street. Pen attended a grammar school in Streatham. She described her education thus: "It was a typical grammar school education ... I learned a lot about Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy but nothing about politics, money or my own position in life."

In 1962 she went on to Goldsmiths Art College and is also critical of the education she received there: "The fine art department had no female lecturers and the dominant genre was Modernist abstraction. We were never told about radical modernist or conceptual art ... we were not taught aesthetics or art history - in fact we were not encouraged to read at all - so there was no context in which we were able to link art to our social conditions or to the kind of people we were. I left art college able to paint, but completely ignorant. I was unaware of the existence of any women artists, let alone any working-class women artists: so there were no models, no precedents." Pen remembers the behaviour of the lecturers who would: "...pick off the prettiest girls to have affairs with. I remember being upset that I wasn't

picked: obviously I wasn't pretty enough! We were considered as 'dolly birds': fair game"

She felt an intense conflict between her desire to be an artist, her gender and upbringing: "There was the working-class thing where I assumed I'd get married and have children, yet in another part of my mind - I'd always been 'good at art' - I assumed I was going to be an artist. I never reconciled the two or thought how difficult it would be: I never imagined how I would cope with children and an art practice. I just assumed I'd have to do the art bit secretly." Pen points out that the idea of the sixties being a liberating time for women is largely a myth: "... The pill was hard to get ... you had to go to a special doctor and pretend you were married or at least in a stable relationship. It was OK for the blokes ... they had as much sex as they wanted. Although we were supposed to be streetwise, swinging London art students ... most of the time we were worried frantic about getting pregnant. Of course a lot did, and women were having illegal backstreet abortions, left, right and centre."

Pen left Goldsmiths with her "confidence totally shattered". She went on to Brighton to do a teaching certificate in 1967, and married the same year, still "not having any real notion of feminism or any sort of politicised understanding or real knowledge about art." She returned to London, and spent two years teaching art in a South London Comprehensive then returned to Brighton with her husband, John, who had a place as a mature student at Sussex University. Sussex University at that time was a politically radical and exciting place: "Practically every night there was a different meeting in our living room ... mainly socialists or Trotskyists or Libertarian Socialists - all arguing with each other." Pen did not participate: she was "reduced to the role of making the tea" while she listened to the men talking about equality and liberation. She remembers some middle class, left-wing women students who tried to involve her in politics and feminism: "They used to talk to me a bit patronisingly, as John's wife, and I remember feeling both interested and resentful; I had a feeling it was important, yet I couldn't see where art or my life as a mother fitted in to what they were saying." John tried to encourage her to attend political and early feminist meetings at Sussex university but ... "I was resistant. By that time I had a child and I felt they weren't interested in motherhood or in art. These things just weren't on the political agenda in 1971. Socialist feminism was about equal pay, contraception, abortion and a 'woman's right to choose' ... art was seen as part of the 'ideological superstructure' and it was assumed that, if you were married with children, you were beyond help." She had given up her art practice and had become "just a housewife".

Pen began reading *The Feminine Mystique* in 1971 (Betty Friedan, 1967) the night before her first child was born: "I remember being terribly excited by it and then went into hospital, had Joe, and through the pain and fear of it all, experienced what can only be called an epiphany. I understood, I think for the first time, what it was to be a woman, have a woman's body, and I felt a great sense of community with other mothers who had been through the same experience. Up till then I'd been competing with men, thinking of myself in linear terms of career and jobs. Having a baby puts a stop to that kind of timekeeping, it forces you back to your body, and to what really counts". After Joe's birth, Pen returned to drawing after not having made any art for three years. She jettisoned all the abstract values she had absorbed at Goldsmiths and began to make naked, aggressive, almost bestial female images. Yet this kind of

practice was out of fashion, neither acceptable to the Fine Art establishment, nor to Socialist Feminism. “There was no-one I could think of at that time, who was making art in relation to motherhood and childbirth, that wasn’t either sentimental or conventional.”

Pen remembers her husband bringing home from Sussex, an early pamphlet by Monica Sjoo entitled *Towards a Revolutionary Feminist Art* which was to be the start of her active involvement in feminism. “I thought Monica’s writing was a bit raving, but there were truths she expressed that meant a lot to me”. For instance Monica had for the first time : “... politicised childbirth, class and art. She was the only person I’d come across who talked about these things together”. However “I wasn’t quite convinced by the spiritual and Goddess pre-occupations. But it caught my imagination in a way that the left wing feminists never had, and I thought it terribly important somehow, although intellectually I couldn’t go along with it... but I think it’s awful the way the matriarchal feminists have been written out of mainstream feminist art history.” As a result of reading the pamphlet, Pen visited Bristol and the ‘womanpower’ group of women artists who had just exhibited at Swiss Cottage. She later wrote an essay that was published in Monica Sjoo’s *Towards a Revolutionary Feminist Art Number Two*.

In 1973, just before the birth of her second child, Pen went to a meeting held at Sussex University. Pen recalls that: “It was packed in a way you don’t see today. I remember sitting at the back feeling conspicuous because they were mostly younger academic students and I’d just come in from town to try and get my drawings shown at the gallery there (The Gardner Centre) ... and I was very pregnant ... The meeting had been arranged for a group of women who had started a women’s house together. This was an entirely new idea then, and not just to me. I remember being puzzled as to why women should want to live together. I suppose because I was preoccupied with my own condition, I was asking questions like ‘what about children?’ ‘what do you do for sex?’ ... What I hadn’t twigged was that the women were lesbians. Lesbianism just wasn’t on the agenda in those days and these women were not able to admit their sexuality at the meeting; they just looked embarrassed... I was very naïve, very ignorant. Pen found that her questions generated discussion yet it was the men in the audience, being more articulate, who were dominating the meeting. She became indignant, asked why they were there; requesting them to leave or let the women speak. In the end, the men were voted out. Afterwards the women invited Pen to further feminist activities. “What thrilled me was that I was for the first time speaking in front of a large audience, and people were listening! I felt wanted, included. I suddenly believed I had something interesting to say”. A few days later Pen gave birth to her daughter, Constance, and Connie’s first outing at 5 days old, was to a Women’s Liberation conference back at Sussex University. Pen was still seeing her GP and told him she was going to the conference. He asked if she was ‘going there to barrack the feminists’ because he couldn’t imagine a mother could also be a feminist: “Feminists in those days were, by definition single, young and unmarried”. She also exhibited some of her drawings at the conference(1973). The crèche for the conference was 5 miles distant, in the town, run by entirely by men. Pen was reluctant (and unable) to leave her new-born, breast fed baby so far away. Connie cried in the meeting and some women were irritated. She cites this as further evidence of the gap between the interests of socialist feminist university-educated women, and the needs of women who were mothers.

After this Pen became more actively involved in feminist activities. She joined a consciousness raising group; she produced the illustrations for leaflets for the Anti Miss World campaign where feminists famously disrupted the beauty contest at Brighton Pavilion, and posters for the 'Ms campaign', and free abortion campaigns, doing illustrations, layout, cartoons and later writing for many others. She also worked for a [Brighton based] women's newspaper called *A Woman's Place*. She attended the first meeting of women artists in 1973 which was held in Bristol and organised by Monica Sjoo. She remembers at the Bristol conference "...women took their clothes off at the final get-together, and were dancing naked in a spontaneous gesture of trust and solidarity ... There were scores of them ... It never reached the press and nobody took photographs. There was no documentary of the event ... I didn't take my clothes off, I was too shy, ... but it was absolutely amazing the trust that women had with each other. That notion of sisterhood was very strong". Incredibly all the feminist artists in Britain – "and I remember Mary Kelly, Margaret Harrison, Sue Madden were there" were able to fit into one small room. Pen's cartoons were published in *Spare Rib* magazine and are still being reproduced.

Early in the 1970s Pen sold her wedding and engagement rings to raise money to start up a print workshop. She also received money through the organisation C.L.A.P. (The Community Levy for Alternative Projects) where money was donated by individuals to new radical initiatives. Her aim was to: "... set up a left-wing feminist poster making [press] to make posters that were colourful and decorative. Posters up till then had been black, red and white: documentary photography not particularly visually interesting". Her print workshop was open to other radical projects and she produced posters from about 1973-80 which sold all over the English speaking world and Europe. She was influenced by the Cuban Film posters. The posters were never signed or authored which has led to much of it being misattributed and lost. Many of her posters drew attention to the neglect of women's issues within left-wing politics. For example: "There was one left-wing poster that said: 'There will be no Women's Liberation without Socialism and there will be no Socialism without Women's Liberation' ... It was the belief of the political left that women should wait till after a socialist revolution before anything would change. So I quickly brought out a poster which said 'Women's Liberation IS The Revolution' – and I still believe it." There was quite a deal of hostility between the male political left and radical feminism at that time. Pen's posters are now housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Musée de la Publicite, and are now part of the visual imagery of early seventies feminism.

Pen also began to organise what would have been the second women's art exhibition in Britain. Women artists who were to become prominent were interested: Monica Sjoo, Alexis Hunter, Helen Chadwick, Jo Spence and Francis Treanor, but, like Monica before her, Pen encountered hostility and uninterest from galleries and art critics as few people could understand why anyone would want an exhibition specifically of women's art. Established women artists declined to be involved as they did not want to be associated - at that time - with feminism. It was about the time when the artist Bridget Riley said 'we need feminism like a hole in the head' and that was the feeling of most professional female artists and art students at the time. Eventually the show went ahead, promoted by Penny Sparke, at the women's cultural festival at Sussex University. She regrets now that she did not accept Rosika Parker's

invitation to write about it: “It’s important: documenting stuff, if you don’t archive your events they slip out of history, its as if they haven’t happened.”

In 1975 Pen joined her husband who had been teaching at the University of Southern California and she taught there too for a while. She found it difficult to continue her ideas in the same way in California: “it was totally apolitical and hard to do feminist work” so she began to paint again. And when she returned to Britain in 1976 to do an MEd, the political and economic climate had changed. Feminism no longer seemed as optimistic as it had been, so encouraged by Dale Spender and her reading on the MEd course she began to write and publish essays and reviews on issues of feminism, culture and art education. She continued to be involved in community arts, in small press publishing and in art education. In 1980 she had to reluctantly move once again with her family to Devon. They moved to Tavistock, where she found the isolation difficult. But it was an opportunity to give up teaching and to concentrate on art-making. By this time she had decided to give up making posters: “Posters with a one-off slogan had been very popular in the early seventies, but through reading, I understood that issues in feminism had become more complex and needed more complex kinds of responses.” During this time she exhibited prints at the Aspek Gallery in Portsmouth, and at various mixed shows. She visited London often and worked with the Lentahll Road print workshop, and helped to work on the first issues of the *Feminist Art News* (with Kate Walker, Monica Ross and others).

The Master’s course had introduced her to debates in critical theory, to film and photography and these areas plus her own studies in feminism and psychoanalysis set her on the path of a more critical art practice. “Feminism was marginal, it was hard to be accepted as a fine artist. I never felt part of the art world. But neither did I feel accepted as a ‘real’ feminist because the socialist feminists at that time tended to see art as a superficial, marginal, typically ‘feminine’ practice. I was out of touch and far away from what was happening in London and conceptual art at that time.” In 1984 Pen was invited to teach as a VL (visiting lecturer) at Dartington College of Arts: “There were no women on the staff of the ‘Art and Social Context’ course, and two lesbian students stuck their necks out and insisted on having a woman to assess their final show.” The head of department rang up the Women Artists Slide Library, of which I was a member, and I was brought in.” Pen was later permanently employed there, and began to teach print-making and cultural theory. For a while the department thrived and was one of the few places that regularly employed women lecturers: Kate Walker, Rita Keegan, Judith Rugg, Sheila Clayton and Rose Garrard also worked there. From the ’80’s to the ’90’s Pen published articles on feminist arts, wrote for *Make* (the erstwhile WASL libraries’ journal), and the *International Journal of Women’s Studies*. She also exhibited at Spacex in Exeter. In 1999 she was invited by the British Council to Exhibit as one of five British Women Printmakers in Madrid, and she has lectured in, amongst other places, Leeds, London, Rome, New York, Madrid on issues of feminism, art and art education. She has written for journals and has just completed a book on gender and art education. In 1990 with the first round of Thatcher’s cuts, the Art & Social Context Course at Dartington was forced to close and all the staff made redundant. Pen moved on to UWE at Bristol where a version of the course continued under the leadership of Sally Morgan, and then in 1993 took a half-time post at the University of Central England on the MA in Art & Education. (where she still works). She now teaches about subjectivity in relation to art, to students on Masters degrees in Fine Art and Art Education.

In terms of the factors that drew her to feminism, Pen believes that her grammar school education gave her expectations about equality and opportunities that had not been met in society at large and only found force within the women's movement. The gaps in her education had, she believed, left her ignorant and it was only through consciousness raising and study groups in the Women's movement that she began to try to redress this: "The Women's Movement was such an educative force ... We all realised that we knew nothing of our own histories or social position as women, or anything. ... I realised that my personal feelings of lack and failure were not mine alone, nor were they 'our fault' but had been brought about by a modern girl's education that led us to expect only wifedom, motherhood and low-paid employment."

Pen believes that the feminism of the early 1970's came largely from the interests of socialist and middle-class young women university students. "I think later on it was older women who perhaps hadn't been university educated but who'd come through an art school, or perhaps media studies; women who had children and also lesbians who started to put things like gender politics, childbirth, the body, pleasure and sexuality on the agenda, often resisted by socialist feminists who were still working 'for the revolution'. Seeing Mary Kelly's work for the first time in 1979 was pivotal for me. Kelly is a conceptual artist working in fine art. For the first time she brought issues of motherhood, childcare, and subjectivity as legitimate practice into the field of fine art. Her work attracted me because it gave me a way of understanding my own situation as an artist, a feminist and a mother. Unlike much of the work on motherhood in the early 70s it rejected the idea of an essential femininity, and the naturalness of mothering. I continue to regard Mary Kelly as one of the most important artists of the 20th century. From making art out of a need to understand where and who I was, I noticed with amazement that feminism and feminist art was becoming acceptable; even fashionable in mainstream culture... it became a kind of spearhead of critical practice... a paradigm of postmodern practice".

Pen attended most of the early WLM conferences and she describes how initially they followed a model used in left-wing politics of having fixed agendas and aims, committees and leaders. But later it fragmented as... "we realised it was ridiculous... we were talking about half the world. How can you narrow down women's interests to six or ten feminist aims? Women of colour were intervening and lesbian and queer identities were intervening." Pen goes on to describe how diverse feminism has become: "There are many women's movements now... some of which are reactionary and some of which are transformative... there are women who are fighting on hidden fronts, doing unknown and heroic things on an everyday basis: working with domestic violence, with sexworkers, on low pay in education, politics and social welfare: they are people who are doing important feminist work". Pen has some regret that there is no women's movement now, no CR or study groups to which women can bring their experiences. She teaches her students about feminist art in a way that does justice to its diversity and the contexts in which it was created: "I insist on teaching art histories so that they are aware of the gaps and ... I make sure I show slides of people like Monica's Sjoo's work and that [work] of lesser known feminists is privileged, so they are not dropped out of art history... with the help of archives and pamphlets and I emphasise lesser known histories. I believe that is one of the roles of the feminist educator". She is dismayed by the humourless, pleasureless image of feminists

generally perceived by the media at large: “I think it is a hangover of the dominance of socialist feminism, they did all the writing, and its their history of feminism that has been recorded. When you actually go back to the seventies – before journalists and cultural commentators were interested – feminism outside of the socialist feminists was completely anarchic – the dancing in the buff for instance – it was so *silly* and so much fun. There were lots of women who were doing some amazing performances, theatre, cartoons {Jo Nesbitt) but they were never documented, they were too busy doing it ... There were women in ‘*Sistershow*’ – a woman’s cabaret act from Bristol, I think, who were hilarious, very funny. In the very early years feminists wore makeup, dressed up, and it was feminists who first questioned the left’s insistence on ‘political correctness’: (I produced an anti-political-correctness poster in 1975). There was a lot of radical art that aggressively celebrated femininity – I remember Sue Madden and working with a group on a banned book of poems by Robin Morgan. It was the influence of women on the left – Marxism and their hard-line socialist men who tended to be a down on the pleasure bit.”

In terms of the achievements of the period, Pen reflects on how much ideas of art have changed due to the impact of feminism: “...the students I teach now ... they’re making stuff about their bodies, about sexuality, about domestic work,... about spirituality with no sense of self censorship”. These diverse and personal themes are very different from the large abstract canvases that were the only acceptable way of doing ‘art’ when Pen was a student. She feels that her students don’t realise that they have this debt to feminism: “I tell them this true story: When I lived in S. London in the 1960s and had just started college ... I remember looking out of my bedroom window at the house opposite, where my neighbour, on the front steps, was sitting, holding her baby. She was, not unusually in our street, a black woman. I often drew people from my window where I could not be seen. I eventually made a painting of her when I was back in the studio at Goldsmiths...When I saw my tutor’s reaction, I realised I’d made a mistake. He asked. ‘Why don’t you paint something in your own experience?’ ... He just didn’t like it... at that time everyone was doing abstract painting. I felt everyone was looking at me and sneering and I didn’t defend myself. To do a picture of a mother and child! and a black mother and child, was so *embarrassing*... You just *could not do it*”. I felt ridiculed and humiliated, and returned to Goldsmith’s sometime later with a painting showing an abstract rendering of light. His relief was palpable. I never painted anything recognisable at college - let alone a mother and child - after that”. Pen thinks her feminism has impacted on her own children who are now grown up: “My daughter says everyone calls her a feminist; she never knew she was a feminist; she’d taken so much for granted. It’s the same with my son, he finds he knows more about feminism than the women he dates. I never made a big thing about it, bringing them up. They just saw me, the books and the pictures around, and heard the arguments about housework!”

Pen stresses that patriarchy is still a potent force but one which mutates: “changes its spots”. Only certain feminist issues are in the forefront at any particular time. She believes an understanding of how power functions on societal level is crucial: “I am dismayed when young women now believe that power is a personal thing.” She is critical of the idea of ‘girl power’, of ‘self-help’, the idea that if there’s a problem it’s somehow your own fault. “Girls are still not brought up to look at the wider context of the world in which they’re living, their economic future, the opportunities available to you and also your immediate structural relationships to other people... therapeutic

ideas of personal liberation... can only get you so far. I think one of the reasons personal therapies are so popular is because they're apolitical, it throws problems back onto individual solutions. It's the same in art practice... A lot of art has become detached from economic or political understanding of its own embeddedness in power. The only issues that survive from feminism are those about 'sexual liberation' because it makes good journalist copy and on its own, without an economic dimension, doesn't fundamentally disturb capitalist relations. Patriarchal capitalism doesn't mind who does the work, queer or black or women, so long as they don't question money and economic power. The boring things – and to my mind the most subversive – like wages for housework, male violence, equal pay and equal childcare arrangements for which women are still struggling – how often do you see them in the media? The implications of including children, of the old: those inscribed as non-sexual, non-productive are profoundly subversive.” Pen feels that feminism is underground at the moment. “It's the F word isn't it? Students don't want to know about feminism and I have a hard job recruiting for my courses. I had to change the name of one. It used to be called 'Art and Feminism' and now its called 'Gender and Sexuality' ... they'll come if it's represented as sexy, fashionable, and colourful. I'm not saying these concerns are unimportant, far from it, but they need to be politically and economically situated”. For Pen, feminism, art practice and her experiences as a mother are inextricably linked. She believes it is vitally important to supply the new generation of younger women with the contexts, the histories, debates and the work which has shaped the world they now experience.

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

MIRIAM (AKA MIKI) DAVID



Miki David is Director of the Graduate School of Social Sciences and a Professor of Policy Studies in Education at Keele University. She lives in Tufnell Park in North London. Her main feminist involvements have been: early women's liberation meetings in London [and Leeds], being part of the London Women's Workshop, attending national women's liberation conferences, being a member of consciousness raising groups in London and Bristol, being part of the *Half the Sky* collective, Bristol women's liberation group member and campaigner on issues such as equal pay, childcare and abortion rights, membership of the working women's charter group, socialist feminist groups and conferences, women's reading group, and helping to create and teach on early women's studies courses.

Miki was born in Keighley, West Yorkshire in 1945. Her parents were Jewish. Her father had fled Nazi Germany and her mother was from Manchester, which was where her parents met. Her father worked as a professional engineer and her mother was a teacher who returned to teaching when Miki was about eleven. Miki feels that her mother was an important influence on her as she had gone to university (very unusual at the time) and trained as a teacher. Miki also feels that her mother going back to her career as a "married woman returner...was quite formative" in that it showed her that a married woman with three children could also have a career outside the home. Miki feels that her mother: "... was very frustrated as a housewife and she was very keen really to do more with her life than she had done. I think she felt that for her daughters. There was no question ever that the three of us would not go to university and it was just a part of my growing up that we would go to university..." This emphasis on higher education was unusual as most of Miki's school friends got married and had

children soon after leaving school, although a few went on to teacher training college and a smaller minority went to university.

Miki was the middle child of three girls. She describes the atmosphere when she was growing up as: “a very non-Jewish Yorkshire environment.” When Miki was eleven her family moved to Shipley which is on the outskirts of Bradford but Miki points out that “in those days [it was] a fiercely independent little town.” She describes her parents as being ‘very middle class’ although most of the people she associated with were working class. In terms of the factors that led her to become a feminist, Miki cites the experience of “growing up in a northern, relatively working class town as... somebody who didn’t actually belong there. ... Marginality has been a hallmark of my life. I’ve felt marginal in all sorts of places not quite fitting in or not quite being appropriate, as well as things like my parents being unusual in their community and not coming from there.” Miki attended Keighley Girls’ Grammar School and she points out that many women feminist activists have attended single sex schools and perhaps these have been influential in fostering feminist activity in the post-war period through education and its influences on women’s careers. In her teens, she joined a Jewish and Zionist-Socialist youth movement called Habonim and she points out that many people involved with this group have gone on to be successful and influential. Through this group, Miki became interested in socialism and left politics, which she feels paved the way for her feminist interests and activism.

Miki started off her university education at Strathclyde and later transferred to Leeds University to read Sociology. For Miki, “choosing Sociology was very much part of those formative socialist and collective experiences” in that Sociology (especially in the 1960’s) was about critically analysing society and hopefully contributing to social and political change. Miki has written autobiographically about her life at this time in a book called *Personal and Political: Feminisms, Sociology and Family Lives* (2003) which combines the sociologies of family life and social and educational policies from a feminist perspective with her own reflections on the period from early formative feminism through to the present day. Miki found Leeds University to be active politically and there were other people studying there at that time who subsequently became part of the early women’s movement. After graduation she kept in contact with friends who were still studying in Leeds and she attended some early feminist meetings there in 1967/8. Miki moved to London after graduating as it “seemed to be the place to be” i.e. at the hub of political action. In the autumn of 1966 Miki got a job at the Institute of Psychiatry where she was a statistical research assistant. She wasn’t keen on this as she didn’t much like statistics although she had been trained to do social statistics! She was very involved in left politics and associated with people with jobs in academia, social research etc... but who regarded themselves primarily as political activists.

In 1967 Miki went to Israel as a volunteer because of 'The Six-Day War' in June and eventually was on a kibbutz. She was offered a place on a Master's course at the Hebrew University but eventually turned it down because of fears that her Hebrew would not be good enough. Miki returned to London to work at the LSE as a Research Assistant. It was here that she met Hilary Land who was also a Research Assistant and they became good friends. She and Hilary were involved in setting up a union at LSE for researchers, which was regarded as quite 'daring' in those days. Miki worked on a project about gambling, work and leisure, for which her two bosses could never agree about how to write the project up. Nonetheless both were interested in men's responsibilities for childcare, which was very unusual at that time. As a result, Miki became interested in men's involvement in childcare. This contributed to her own thinking about traditional family roles and family values and has influenced her feminism. She describes the time thus: "It was a time of social ferment, change and people beginning to question traditional family ways and family values and get involved in various political groups."

Miki went to work at Queen Mary College on an education project, but her department was Economics, which was almost completely male, although there were three other women there. Her boss, Maurice Peston was quite sympathetic to liberal ideas about women. Outside her work, Miki joined the growing women's liberation movement and became involved in a consciousness-raising group in Haverstock Hill which she was in for about three years. These tended to be closed groups with about eight members who met regularly to discuss their lives and experiences in terms of their personal lives. The slogan 'the personal is political' came from these groups. The various embryonic women's groups joined together to form the London Women's Workshop, a precursor of the women's liberation movement. Miki remembers the introduction session at her London CR group when a woman called Monica Foot said 'laconically' "I'm here 'cause I'm really tired of making tea for men in men's groups". Miki felt that struck a chord with her group, at the time many of them had come from left politics and found that their role in left wing groups seemed to be simply to make the tea! Her CR group met for three years and became good friends. They produced an issue of *Shrew* (the London women's workshop magazine) together. Miki also became involved with setting up one of the first children's centres for pre-school children and which was also a precursor of the childcare movement. Her group started to campaign on women's issues and go on demos, especially about abortion, as there were constant attempts to revoke the 1967 Abortion Act. In March 1971 the group went on the first women's liberation demo in London about abortion and equal pay. A 2001 Guardian article about it included a photograph of which Miki still has the other half! She points out that the demo was extremely important and many people who have since gone on to become very successful or famous as activists were present. She remembers attending lots of demos around that time. They all went to the second national women's liberation conference (held in Skegness in 1971) and Miki describes it thus: "It was very dramatic. I shall never forget it. It was very argumentative. Lots of people debating issues." Suzy Fleming (who later became involved in Wages for Housework) was a keynote speaker and Miki remembers the heated discussions this group started to generate. There were a number of different strands to the early women's movement and one of the strands later became Wages for Housework. Miki wasn't involved with this later on but she remembers: "going to meetings where [Selma James] talked

a lot about going into supermarkets, filling your trolley, going to the exit, refusing to pay and saying 'charge it to the state!'" Miki cannot remember anyone actually doing this but the suggestion has stuck in her mind.

In 1972 Miki went to work at Harvard for a year and she had preconceived ideas about women's liberation over there. "It appeared that the women's movement in America was much more influential than it was in England but actually during my time in Cambridge, Massachusetts I tried to find the women's movement and it was really hard to find! There was a women's centre but very few of the people I met were involved with it. It was a very interesting year and there were lots of communes so I met lots of people involved in communal activities but not that many people involved in the women's movement directly." Although she did meet some of the women involved in the Boston Women's Health Collective (who published the influential *'Our Bodies, Ourselves'* women's health guide). Miki was doing research in the sociology of education and Harvard Graduate School of Education was very influential for this. She met lots of interesting people there, but from education and sociology, not feminism, but she regards the year as an important time for her academic and self-development.

In 1973 Miki gained her first university lectureship in what was then called Social Administration at the University of Bristol where Hilary Land also worked. From 1974 Miki taught a course at the university (with Jackie West and Hilary Land) called family and social policy. Then they began to teach extra mural courses as well and she remembers teaching some at the Folk House on Park St and also in Cheltenham, Gloucester and Taunton. Miki remembers Helen Haste as quite active in getting the go ahead from the university for the courses. Later Liz Bird was appointed to take over the running of extra mural studies and the courses really grew in number and proved very popular. Through her work on extra mural courses, Miki became involved in setting up the *Half the Sky* collective, which was a group of women in Bristol who put together an early women's studies reader. Most of the women in the collective were teaching on the women's studies extra mural courses. The lack of books on women's studies spurred them into getting together to produce *Half the Sky*. It took over two years to produce because everything had to be decided democratically and the group had to make some difficult decisions (which they all had to agree or compromise on) about what to put in and what to leave out. During the time spent producing *Half the Sky*, Miki got married and had her two children. She points out that: "getting married around the women's movement was something you just weren't supposed to do and most of my friends in the women's movement did not get married." The decision whether or not to get married was very topical at the time and there was a 'Why Be a Wife?' campaign in which Miki's friend Hilary was closely involved.

Linda Ward was one of the members of the *Half the Sky* collective and she was also a PhD student of Miki's which proved vitally important for Miki as well: "... we didn't use the word feminist until Linda made us! ... Linda was doing a thesis on birth control in the 1920's that it was really interesting. She was looking at the women's groups who campaigned for birth control and she decided she wanted to use the word 'feminist' in the title and I got kind of scared about this because it wasn't a word in usage then. We all use it now [but] gender was nowhere on the agenda back then. We would talk about stuff like the sexual division of labour... and women's issues and the women's movement but we didn't use the word feminist although it had been an early twentieth century word. However Linda said "we've got to start calling ourselves feminists" and she wanted the title in her thesis... In those days students had to have their thesis title approved by a university body and because I was her supervisor I had to take it to faculty board... I arrived a few minutes late as I'd been teaching and they'd already got onto Linda's thesis title and I walked into this room which was of course 99% men... I got asked *why* you had to have feminist in the title of a thesis. It was really hard to defend... saying this was the stance you were taking because in those days you were supposed to take a neutral objective stance and not put your values in." Eventually the title was approved which paved the way for other pieces of work to be explicitly feminist and Miki still thinks of it as a learning experience.

The Bristol Women's Liberation Group of which Miki was an active member, campaigned around the original four key 'demands' namely equal pay and equal educational opportunities, 24-hour nurseries (now childcare) and abortion rights. Eventually other demands such as 'against violence against women', and women's legal and financial independence were added. Miki remembers attending a women's conference in Bristol in 1974 where there was a "lively debate about family allowances" and the Wages for Housework group were again very vocal. Miki attended feminist meetings at the first Bristol women's centre (then in the basement of Ellen Malos' house). She also remembers being involved in campaigning to get other premises for the women's centre, being involved in the working women's charter group and helping out at the Wills' tobacco workers' strike. She was also a member of the Bristol socialist feminist group, the socialist reading group, and the women's reading group. She remembers attending the first national socialist feminist conference (particularly one in Birmingham in 1975) and national WLM conferences with her group from Bristol.

Miki was also involved in a CR groups in Bristol, which included some (not all) of the women from the *Half the Sky* collective. They met every week for about 3 years. Some issues discussed in the CR group would later be dealt with in *Half the Sky*. Some fairly intense emotions and opinions were discussed and Miki feels the Bristol CR group petered out in the end because of "interpersonal relationships". Miki sums up her experiences of the CR group, *Half the Sky*, and the Bristol WLM thus: "Being in the women's movement in Bristol generally was wonderful but we did have a lot of stormy argumentative moments and we were not all at one with each other."

In terms of the general achievements of the period, Miki feels that: "... our achievements were mammoth and it's only with hindsight you can see that... one of the achievements was that we had wonderful friendships." Although she does point out that: "... one of the things that is only obvious subsequently is just how white and middle class we all were and on the whole heterosexual, although there were some

people in the groups who were lesbian and for whom it was difficult to come out as lesbian then”. Indeed she feels that one of the achievements of the WLM was to: “make it safer and easier for people to declare their lesbianism.” She regards the campaigning and activism that her group were involved in as having a huge influence on social policy, on women’s expectations of life and the way ‘women’s issues’ are viewed by the majority. But Miki stresses that women cannot be seen as one group, there are class and race patterns of disadvantage which are still operating. She feels that childcare provision has changed due to the demands of the WLM although it is nowhere near as extensive or available as it should be. Miki stresses that in some ways things have become more complex: “... the fact that now all women work and it’s acceptable that women work full time whilst having children, [should be seen as an achievement, yet] ... full time work now is so awful you probably don’t want to do it anymore. All these issues are threaded through with questions about economic context, socialism and the nature of capitalism and so on...” She feels happy about the impact of feminism on academia: “...*Half the Sky* is really old hat now but I think that’s an achievement... We have created a new body of academic and intellectual knowledge and it has got a totally different orientation.”

She feels that feminism is still very relevant: “I certainly don’t think one should argue that feminism is over or should be over just because we accomplished things and achieved changes. We’ve always got to be vigilant as to how revokable many of them are and how easy it is to revoke those changes.” She hopes the achievements of the period have been of benefit for her daughter’s (and her son’s) generation but has her anxieties about this: “I think the pressure on young women now... is both to be academically successful and to be socially, sexually and in every way, successful and I think those pressures are much greater than they were on us... We didn’t have the pressure on us both to be beautiful and get the A* and all of that...” But in terms of her own life and her involvement in ‘second wave’ feminism, Miki is clear that: “... [for my] generation of women, our lives were changed. Our lives were not what our mothers’ lives were like and in that sense we were lucky and privileged.”

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

JO ELIOT



Jo Eliot now lectures part time in film studies at the Drama Department of the University of Bristol. She also lectures on a freelance basis for the University of the West of England. Her main feminist involvements have been: helping to set up the Feminist Archive in Bristol, Sistershow, and organising feminist conferences, Women's Studies for the Open University, a member of the course team for the MA in Women's Studies at UWE, National Abortion Campaign, Working Women's Charter Group, setting up an after-school playscheme, teaching Women's Studies, Greenham support group, and teaching assertiveness and confidence building skills for women.

Jo Eliot was born in 1945 in North London. She describes her father as being part of the; "Labour aristocracy" as he was the editor of a Labour newspaper which had been founded by the Chartists. Her mother came from a trade union background and journalists and politicians frequented their house. Jo remembers politics being central in her background and her family being very sociable and having lots of parties, although their labour politics made them unusual for the area they lived in. It was also an unusual background in terms of social class as both parents were from a working class background and both were from the North East whilst Jo was brought up in a way that she describes as: "...very middle class London". Jo remembers being involved in CND from an early age and attending the first Aldermaston marches to protest against nuclear weapons..

Jo went to North London Collegiate school, the oldest girls' day school in the country. She describes it as: "a wonderful school with wonderful teachers". Whilst there she was a friend of Susie Orbach, (the famous psychotherapist and author of *Fat is a Feminist Issue*). Jo was "quite rebellious" at school although she was always aware of the importance of education. Most of her teachers were single women who stressed that learning and achievement were important, especially for girls. The headmistress was: "... a wonderful woman who was on the 'Robbins Committee' for the expansion of University education... she would talk to us about the importance of education, current affairs and so on... you were imbued from eleven that you should be interested in the world." Jo also feels that her parents relationship was one of the

factors that led to her becoming a feminist: “My father was old style working class, from Newcastle ... a very powerful man and a very dominant man.... [her mother was] a very bright, lively character... after he died she really became herself in her late seventies and even changed her name!” She recalls her mother having rows with her father about housekeeping money and frequently complaining that she didn’t have any independence. However, Jo admired her father’s passion and commitment and points out that although her mother’s lack of independence influenced her profoundly, she wouldn’t describe their marriage as being unhappy.

At age eighteen Jo went to study Drama and teaching at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. Whilst she was there she got married, aged nineteen which she now regards as: “... a bizarre thing to do and it was bizarre of my parents to let me.” In 1968 her husband went to Lancaster University to study Linguistics and Jo went with him to a job lecturing in Drama and English at St Martin’s teacher training college which is now part of Lancaster University. Socially it was a good time as her husband was very involved in student politics and the university was very active and radical at that time. Jo gives the following example: “.... one of the guys had a sex change and went from ‘Dave’ to ‘Carol’ during the three years!... Which was amazing when you think this was the late sixties and early seventies”. Jo became friendly with other academic women and remembers them having: “...vague intimations of things going on in London to do with feminism. Like the demonstrations against the Miss World contest.” They formed a women’s group in Lancaster; “There were four of us in the meetings and we didn’t really know what we were doing, or what it was about...a small group in the provinces, not quite knowing what but knowing there were changes afoot.” Jo also remembers reading *The Feminine Mystique* (Betty Friedan, 1965) at this point and had earlier read *The Second Sex* (Simone de Beavour, 1953). She points out that her background and reading were more influential at this point than her own life as: “I had an interesting job, I was actually *supporting* my husband as he was a student, so it didn’t feel necessarily that my life was particularly touched by the contradictions that were inherent in women’s lives, their social and economic position and so on”. At this point Jo felt that her left-wing politics were still more influential than feminism. However later she was particularly influenced by *Woman’s Consciousness, Mans World* (Sheila Rowbotham, 1973) and describes herself as being; “... completely blown away” by it as it was a powerful attempt to reconcile left politics with feminism. She felt this dilemma profoundly as she found herself through her political activism interacting with men who were committed to socialism but were untouched by feminism: “the sexual politics of these left political men was appalling. This was true of my second husband who I admired enormously for his energy and oratorical skills but his sexual politics were shocking!”.

In 1972 Jo left her first husband and moved to Bristol to teach Drama and English at St. Mathias College (now part of UWE). She married again in Bristol in 1973. Jo remembers meeting Liz Bird in Bristol who is still a close friend. Liz was looking for people to teach on Women’s Studies courses that she was organising. She held a meeting to which lots of women came and brainstormed ideas and topics that they would like to be involved with. Jo was asked to help direct the second ‘Sistershow’ (a women’s cabaret) in Bristol. She also helped to organise a conference at St. Mathias: “What was interesting about it was this was a C of E training college, very old fashioned in a lot of ways and we put on this conference. We had Selma James come

down to speak ... and we had all sorts of incredible displays and graffiti and sexist ads, as it was very easy to put on a display. It caused a sensation though.” Jo recalls that not all her colleagues were sensitive to feminism. The head of the male dominated English department (a man) said to her: The trouble with feminists is they can’t keep their marriages together”. Jo stresses that these kind of remarks were deeply hurtful: “... we still had an awful lot of stuff that we hadn’t yet got rid of so a remark like that would make you really angry but at the same time there was that sense that at the bottom line if you can’t make your marriage work you’re not much of a woman. It was a conflict between femininity and developing feminism. There were many of those kinds of remarks... like ‘feminists are all lesbians’ or ‘feminists are ugly’ and the idea that if you were a ‘proper’ woman you wouldn’t conceivably be attracted to feminism”. Jo also remembers debates within feminism about whether women should wear make-up, which she felt were quite silly: “I always liked to wear make-up because of my theatrical side”.

Jo was also involved in an arts festival in Bristol called ‘Women Live’ where she took part in a play about a women’s writing course written by Pat Van Twest. She was involved in the National Abortion Campaign and in 1973 went on a NAC march in London: “I remember thinking ‘I wish I was pregnant’ because then it would be more powerful to carry a banner saying that people should be able to have abortions... because it was about a woman’s right to *choose*”. She was involved in campaigning for 24 hour nurseries and for equal pay, particularly through her involvement with the Working Women’s Charter. She was briefly involved with the main Women’s Liberation Group meetings in Bristol and remembers early meetings in the women’s centre when it was in Ellen’s (Malos) house. She found the meetings problematic because they became: “... so big and divisive and because of my left-politics which were all around democratic centralism and following a party line and having a chair, there was a real tension between that and the totally non-hierarchical everything being equal, of the women’s meetings.” She felt that this way of doing things also had its strengths but she stressed how time-consuming it was to attend lots of meetings with very little structure or agenda and where everything had to be explained again from the beginning for any late/new comers.

In 1975 Jo’s daughter was born and “I really understood what feminism meant when I became a mother.... Intellectually of course I knew what feminism meant as I was reading, talking and organising conferences and bringing it into my teaching and so on, but the real inequalities between men and women didn’t really kick in until I had a child.” She points out that her second husband helped with some of the cooking and did one day a week childcare as she was doing a masters degree. She realises that this was unusual for that time. She felt the lack of prestige in role of mother and housewife and the ‘invisibility’ of women with children quite strongly. She was also upset by “...becoming dependent on somebody else financially and the power that gave them and for me of course there were echoes of the struggles of my parents which I’d obviously internalised.”

Jo left her second husband and became a single parent when her daughter was three and a half. In 1978 she began teaching English and Drama in a large comprehensive school in Bristol where she became an NUT representative. She describes it as an interesting time in education which was fruitful for her own development. Lots of important work was being done – how schools were perpetuating sexism and girls’ underachievement. Jo became; “...the token feminist in the school. A lot of the other

women staff agreed with me but kept quiet about it. I got a women's group going against endless jokes from male colleagues." Jo remembers it as an era in which teachers were becoming politicised and there were lots of strikes. However, she was often finding herself in opposition to her colleagues and having to deal with a large amount of sexism in the workplace. She was also involved in teaching Women's Studies evening classes for the WEA and for the extra-mural department at Bristol University. She describes these courses as "Very exciting, different types of women came along, and they were like consciousness-raising groups in helping to raise confidence and awareness...some of these courses really did change women's lives, I know they did from things that happened." She also taught assertiveness to women (and later in mixed groups). Jo is unhappy with the move away from such courses being women only; "there are a lot more issues you can explore in a single sex group."

In 1983 Jo left her school teaching job and was working part-time at the UWE teaching English, Drama and Education studies. She was also involved in setting up an after school playscheme of which she was on the management committee. She also became involved with the Feminist Archive which was then based in Bath. She was the treasurer of the campaigning group that got the Trinity Road premises in Bristol; "We had a brilliant campaign. We asked for a hundred pounds from a hundred rich feminists. We sat down and brainstormed all the people we could think of who might be a rich feminist because by 1983 quite a few people had made names for themselves...I think we raised £5,000 in the end." She remembers helping to build the partition for the room that the Archive is in now and Fay Weldon (who donated the first archival materials from her attic) came to open it. Jo was involved with the archive for about 6-7 years. She also became involved in the Greenham support group. She took her daughter several times to Greenham at weekends and felt that "It was wonderful, the shared spirit amongst women". Jo enjoyed the way feminism made it possible for women to talk very deeply to each other about how they felt. Jo regrets not being more involved with CR groups and credits them as being "one of the most important things of all that second wave feminism did". In the 1980's, Jo became involved in teaching on a Women's Studies course for the Open University and she was a tutor on the first summer school for 'The Changing Experience of Women'. "It was terrific, being the OU it was a really good course... all sorts of impressive women were involved like Veronica Beechey and Diana Leonard.. the first summer school was so exciting. With the OU you meet such an interesting spread of students with every conceivable background and life history". Jo also tutored on the course and on its successor 'Issues in Women's Studies'. She describes this involvement as being important for her personally and politically.. She also worked for Avon education authority on anti-racist and anti-sexist education. She attributes much of the raising of awareness of equal opportunities to the influence of second wave feminism. Jo feels that the issues of girls' educational 'failure' has been turned around mainly due to feminist work in this area. In 1989-90, Jo was part of an interdisciplinary team at the UWE that designed and taught on the MA in Women's Studies .

In 1993-5 Jo did VSO in Bratislava, Slovakia and since then she has not been 'active' in anything directly to do with feminism, although it still informs her life. Jo tries to describe why this is: "In a way, what is there to be active in? What would I be active in? If there was some campaign, some threat against child allowances say, I would be

up there certainly.” In 1997 Jo took an early retirement redundancy deal from UWE. Since then she has spent periods of time in India both travelling and running workshops for various organisations on teaching methods, facilitated by the Institute of Child Health in London. Jo sees her political activism as now being channelled through development work, her courses in India are for women health workers, usually of minimum education and challenging and empowering for the participants. She still works for the UWE in a freelance capacity and runs courses on how to be an effective trainer. Since 2000 Jo has worked part time for Bristol University.

Jo is fairly vocal about the achievements of the WLM: “I think there’s a whole lot of changes around sexuality. When my generation was growing up one of the addresses you knew off by heart was from the back of *Woman’s Own* problem page: the National Council for Unmarried Mothers in Kentish Town... Obviously some poor girl had written in saying ‘I haven’t had a period’... and it would just give the address as it was too naughty to print the letter because you didn’t have sex before marriage”. She is happy that the stigma has been largely removed from being a single mother and contraception is freely available; “...as a naughty young girl I had to go to Marie Stopes. I was lucky, I was brought up in London, the very first place in the country that gave contraception to people who weren’t married.... I had to hustle along there with a pretend engagement ring because even there you had to say you had a fiancée.” She is also happy about: “... the recognition of the multiplicity of sexualities and the beginning acceptance of transexuality and of the fact that sexuality is fluid...” which she feels is to do with the influence of feminism and alliances that developed between lesbian feminists and gay activists. She also feels there have been: “fantastic changes in education for girls... but of course there is a backlash ... every time the results come out and girls are doing better, there’s all these headlines about what shall we do about boys but from time immemorial there were no headlines saying ‘What shall we do about girls?’. Girls’ educational achievements are so wonderful.” She is also pleased that childcare provision has been expanded although there is still far to go on this one. Jo believes the achievements at Greenham were extremely important. She also feels CR groups were an important achievement of the period and that the feeling of sisterhood could be amazing: “Women weren’t your rivals which is how it had always been structured before. You’d always go out with a bloke if he asked you and let down your girlfriend *and she would expect you to*. Of course you wouldn’t do that now or your girlfriend would have something to say and think less of you for it.” She feels many of the issues that the WLM explored and prioritised have led to: “... my daughter’s generation [being] so much more independent than we were. You don’t have to be attached to a man and their demands from men are so much higher than ours were, which is probably why an awful lot of them are single mums. They don’t have partners because they have much greater an expectation of what men should be like.” She also feels her daughter and her friends were made aware of issues around sexism and racism from an early age and able to recognise prejudice as such. She does however feel sad that young women still seem to have anxiety over their looks and her daughter feels unable to go travelling alone.

Another major achievement Jo cites is the changing attitudes and provision around the areas of rape and domestic violence; “When Erin Pizzey founded the first refuge people didn’t believe [domestic violence] existed or they thought it was a man’s right to hit his wife... that’s not acceptable now and we can even see the changes reflected in soaps”. Jo does however feel that there has been a general backlash: “I hate people

talking about postfeminism. I've got a sticker on my wall which says 'I'll be a postfeminist in post patriarchy'... words are powerful and talk of postfeminism suggests that we are finished with that... but you just have to open any newspaper to see that there is still a long way to go". Jo also feels that the behaviour of some young women in groups is problematic; "Ten years ago you wouldn't see gangs of girls in the city centre pissed out of their minds, [fighting and] throwing up in the street... I find that so depressing. What does it mean to be liberated from your sex role? It means you can behave like a ghastly man! It's all so complex". Jo also feels that: "My own position has moved as well. I don't have an essentialist position, but I do think men and women are profoundly different chromasomically, genetically, psychologically". She also believes that one of the spin-offs from the period was that men were encouraged to talk and explore their behaviour and feelings and yet this emphasis seems to have been lost. She feels that in her own life the twelve years she was on her own between her second husband and her current partner enabled her to use the independence that feminism had given her and helps her to have a healthy relationship now, characterised by understanding and awareness. Jo feels that we really need: "... a third wave to tidy it all up. For the second wave [though] there were so many things you could get out on the streets and campaign about but once you've got legislation in place like the Sex Discrimination Act, advertising standards etc...it's much harder to find something to campaign about". Nonetheless, Jo feels that this 'third wave' which would carry on the spirit of feminist activism and tackle both new and existing concerns is an urgent project for the future.

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

SIAN EVANS

Sian was born in 1961 and grew up in Sidcup – a place she describes as “terrible!”. Sian states that they grew up in terrible poverty and were a left-wing family in a right-wing stronghold. Her mother was from South Africa, and this gave Sian what she describes as an “international perspective”. They often had young black men staying with them – these men had fled from South Africa. This gave Sian a deeper understanding of the world, and allowed her an awareness of political issues she would have never gained from “narrow-minded” Sidcup.

Sian left school with the desire to be a painter. She attended Bath Academy and arrived there with “high expectations”, as the college had a reputation of being rebellious. However, this rebellion was not apparent, for although politics were there, Sian states “they had a small ‘p’!” Sian gradually made contact with others who were motivated in campaigning. Particularly mobilised by anti-nuclear issues she got involved in the anti-nuclear campaign focussed at Torness Nuclear Power Station in Scotland.

Although always interested in peace and the environment, she was unsure how to link these personal fundamental issues and link them on an international basis to poverty and racism. At this time Sian was involved in struggling against the male-dominated art world, trying to defend herself against the rampant sexism she came up against as a female art student. When the Greenham campaign started Sian was “awestruck” by it. On a personal level, it came at a time when she felt she was working out, as a woman, just who she wanted to be. Sian had always wanted to be in a community and was eager to try and understand the community at Greenham. After college she began living in a squat in south London whilst regularly visiting Greenham. After attending the big Hallowe’en event at the camp (thirty thousand women ‘embraced the base’, and cut the majority of the fence down), Sian made the decision to live there. She had been feeling very isolated at the time, so the pull of communal living was a strong incentive too. This exciting time had many challenges, “what you could do as a woman, make your own structures and living outside too”. Although invigorating, this experience also brought complex issues: lesbianism, separatism, lack of hierarchy and leadership. These things proved complex and emotive, and Sian felt at times that there was a mis-match between what was spoken about and what was really going on. To some degree she found it disappointing, it did not prove to be as “alternative” as she had hoped. Trying to bring things out into the open at the camp, whilst remaining emotionally strong under the harsh living conditions and under attacks from the regiments, proved enormously difficult. The extreme conditions gradually had profound effects and despite adopting separatism to some degree, Sian still found the concept defeative. Whilst living/existing in a “bender” at Orange Gate, Sian caught hepatitis. This led her to choose to leave the camp. Strangely she found that after leaving the camp it became easier to share experiences, and make sense of the whole Greenham experience.

Whilst at the camp, Sian first came into contact with the Wages for Housework campaign, which interested her greatly. Drawn to the “pay the women not the military” ethos in particular, Sian was to turn to these women again, as a result of her involvement with the occupation of the last women’s hospital in South London.

Sian had felt lonely and isolated after leaving Greenham, and had joined the squat/occupation of the hospital. “We tried to spell out that we were defending the hospital as a community resource but also demanding it should be more in women’s hands”. As Sian was evicted from there (some eight months later) she increased her contact with the women from WFH campaign/Kings Cross Women’s Centre. This contact allowed Sian to find acknowledgment of what she had already discovered; that poverty and women were linked on an international scale. Here she could make sense of things she had experienced: that the separatist view that “the enemy was the man next door” was not her truth and that feminism had become the pursuit of the middle classes. Sian felt, and still feels herself to be, part of the Women’s Liberation Movement *not* a feminist.

In more recent years, Sian describes the Women’s Centre as her home (it has relocated to Kentish Town). The Centre spent many years supporting the women at Greenham, sending women from the city so women at the camp could sign on, attend court, etc. There was already a split at Greenham over racism. Sian felt it was part of a process that had already been going on – again the difference of what went on at the camp versus how the camp liked to be seen. “For me that was very important, we were trying to define what the camp was about”. There was the saying that Greenham women were everywhere – and the women that lived there did really shoulder a huge work load, women that did nothing glamorous or high profile, purely the day-to-day maintenance of the camp whilst in opposition to everything – “this was so important” states Sian.

Sian is now the single parent mother of her son (aged one and a half at time of interview). She is determined that he will have a realistic outlook about the job he will have in the future. She believes that men are cut off from a set of responsibilities and probably suffer more than they know. Her expectations for her son are quite simply that he will care and not be a killer.

Sian is actively involved in the Global Women’s Strike (through the Women’s Centre) and feels the single-issue campaigns of the eighties has had its day. She states that what has come out more recently (road protests and free party scene) is that women *do* high profile things but they are not always *visible* and that needs to be acknowledged, exposed and ultimately *valued*.

Interviewed by Viv Honeybourne

NICOLA HARWIN



Nicola Harwin is currently the Director of the Women's Aid Federation of England, the national domestic violence charity. She has been a feminist activist since the late 1960s and before moving to Bristol in 1977, was active in Nottingham and London in a number of early women's liberation and community campaigns. Since 1977, she has been involved with the Bristol Women's Centre, Bristol Women's Aid and national Women's Aid.

Nicola was born in 1952 in Leicester, where she lived until 1963. She feels her early life experience influenced the development of a general sensibility about discrimination and equality issues. When the first minority ethnic families coming to her street in the late 1950's, she became friendly with a local Afro-Caribbean family: "I loved going to (her) house because it was always lively and full of music." However Nicola also remembers other neighbours frowning upon the new immigrant families and she had a dim awareness of disapproval and racism. Nicola also remembers developing an awareness of gender discrimination at an early age. "Girls just didn't seem to have the same opportunities and rights as boys and I remember when I was twelve saying to my grandmother 'I'm never going to get married because all women have to do is clear up after men'".

When Nicola started secondary school in Nottingham, she was badly bullied for the first year and her desire to stand up against injustice was also influenced by trying to protect her young disabled brother from being taunted and bullied by other children. Luckily in her second year at secondary school, Nicola met other like-minded girls: "I suppose we just formed a group and became interested in lots of radical issues at the same time. They also began organising at school for student rights and formed a branch of the Schools Action Union. "This was in the mid sixties...it was the beginning of the civil rights movement in the States and there were things starting to happen in this country...we read *The Female Eunuch* together and started getting interested in political issues, left wing ideas, and in women's rights issues.... We went on anti-apartheid demos, read *Schoolkids Oz*, and dressed as outrageously as we could get away with..."

Nicola and her friends started going to early women's liberation meetings whilst they were doing their A levels. Most of the women in the group were in their early twenties and were either at college or were college lecturers. Some of them were members of the International Marxist Group but were part of the 'women's autonomous tendency'. This meant that they believed that there was a need for an autonomous women's movement: that women needed to organise separately to achieve liberation, as well as be part of a wider social movement for change. Many left-wing groups at the time believed that: "... the true struggle was the working class struggle... you shouldn't be organising autonomously for [women's equality] because that was a diversion."

As part of the Nottingham women's liberation group, in the late 60's, Nicola worked on family planning campaigns, "informing women about their right to access family planning because that was obviously a tool for women to take control over their bodies". At this time it was still very difficult for single women to get pregnancy tests and these services began to be set up by feminists and women's centres that were starting to be established. (This was the case in Nottingham and Bristol). She also became involved with helping to produce a magazine called *Women Now* and distributing it in the town centre. The process of doing this was itself very liberating: it was very hands-on, with lots of help and support from other women. "That was one of the things about the early women's movement. We said 'women can do anything' and we were all women getting together and doing things. I also learnt a lot from the other women who had a more intellectual background in feminism and radical politics."

Nicola left school after A levels as she "...wanted to go where the action was, to London. I wanted to be at the heart of the women's movement, that's what I was passionate about..." In London she became involved with women's politics and supporting gay rights activities. She joined Shepherd's Bush Women's Group which was both a campaigning group and a 'consciousness raising' group. Nicola sees 'consciousness-raising' as a key stage in the development of the women's movement and feminist activity in the early 70's. "It was part of the new understanding that the personal is political, that our individual experiences are part of a collective experience and that they can be challenged and transformed". Shepherd's Bush Women's Group was part of the London network of Women's Liberation Groups, and was active in many London-based and national feminist campaigns and conferences, supporting the seven demands of the women's liberation movement. These included campaigns to retain family allowance as a benefit paid to women, reproductive rights and childcare campaigns, as well as local community activities, and the setting up of a local Women's Centre. Nicola was involved when Shepherd's Bush Women's Group produced an issue of *Shrew* (the London Women's Liberation Workshop magazine which was produced in rotation by different London groups). She still has the copy and regards it as: "... a kind of archive of the kind of the feminist humour that was around at that time. We produced a cartoon *Shrew* because we wanted to do something different and we had women cartoonists and artists in our group." While in London, Nicola also worked as a collective member in a women's community press called 'Women in Print'.

After short periods of living in France and Wales in the 70s, in 1977 Nicola moved to Bristol and became involved with the Bristol Women's Centre. She remembers that: "There was an excellent system already established whereby every month there were special introductory meetings run by existing members for new women who might want to be involved in the women's movement, and once settled in Bristol, I took my turn on the rota for this." Women's Aid in Bristol had begun life at the first women's centre in 1973, and again had its public base there in 1978. Nicola had first become involved in Women's Aid in London in the mid-70s, and joined Bristol Women's Aid as soon as she arrived in 1977, first as a volunteer and then from 1978 as a paid worker. While based at the Women's Centre, Nicola devised a manual, for the women's centre volunteers, about how to handle calls on domestic violence. For much of this time Women's Aid had very little funding and she was at times the only paid worker, amongst a group of committed volunteers who worked day and night to keep the service going. Nicola co-ordinated the establishment of the first big purpose-converted refuge house. (Before this Bristol Women's Aid had used a series of short-life temporary houses as refuges. She later set up a second-stage house and outreach services including a Women's Aid shop and advice centre, as part of Women's Aid later service expansion and growth. In 1980, Nicola also worked as the regional co-ordinator for the South West region of Women's Aid, representing views of the region to the national co-ordinating meetings.

By 1981 the local Women's Aid service had been extended and funding had been found for more staff. Nicola stopped being a paid worker for Women's Aid as she decided to go to university to study. She came to realise that her reasons at 18 for rejecting the idea of university, even though she had been offered a place then, were partly confidence-related. "Even though I was quite strong in certain ways, I finally acknowledged that at 18 I had been quite intimidated by the idea and didn't feel confident enough to go into what I saw as predominantly a very middle-class environment. I was the first person in my large extended family to pass the 11 plus, and I was the first person to get into university."

By 1981 Nicola felt more confident in her own abilities: "I'd learnt a lot of skills working in the women's movement. I'd had to meet a lot of challenges in Women's Aid and it had given me the confidence to be able to go to university." Nicola found it 'tough' to go back to university as a mature student, particularly as by this time she also had "two stepsons aged ten and seven who were a very big handful." She also stayed involved with Women's Aid in a voluntary role as the Treasurer, while going on to do a postgraduate qualification as a community social worker in 1985-86.

In 1987, a job opportunity came up for a new post as Co-ordinator with Women's Aid national office, which was relocating to Bristol from London. Nicola was successful in getting the post and became the National Co-ordinator of Women's Aid from 1987-2000. This period saw many changes in the role and services provided by Women's Aid locally and nationally as well as internal organisational changes. From the 1970s many Women's Aid groups had been run collectively as had Women's Aid national office. By the late 1990s many local Women's Aid services had changed from a collective to a hierarchical management structure as part of a process of growth and development and in response to changes in funding, and with the aim of improving management and service delivery. This was reflected at national level in 2000 as the outcome of a two year consultation process. Although Nicola subsequently became

Director (after the post was publicly advertised) she felt ambivalent about this change at the time: “Although I could see the urgent need to restructure into a hierarchy, I’d spent 25 years trying to make collectives work!” Nicola’s job is: “... a strategic policy role in relation to government, liaising with different government departments and trying to basically move the national policy agenda on domestic violence in the context of a whole range of issues about violence against women. We work co-operatively with all sorts of other organisations as a partnership to take forward broader violence against women issues as well as domestic violence itself.” Nicola regards one of the successes of Women’s Aid as “putting domestic violence on the national policy agenda, and getting new laws and services. [Women’s Aid] have done a lot of successful lobbying, collecting data, researching, providing services supporting the national network... we built up a campaigning body as well as a national service provider. We have 250 local organisations that are our members...”

When asked why Women’s Aid was so important to her, Nicola replied: “I suppose quite a lot of us in the mid seventies felt we actually need to be doing something. Providing concrete services... Women’s Aid, Rape Crisis, a lot of services for women started then... I suppose I liked being in a women-only organisation, liked organising with women... I suppose our aims are just so basic... it’s a basic human right to live free from violence. That’s something I’ve always felt very, very strongly about... and probably gripped me more emotionally, more fundamentally than perhaps some of the other issues.” She points out that: “It offered an opportunity to run and deliver services, and that very activity was itself holding out a kind of model... to women, because one of the things about being in an abusive relationship is that you can become very disempowered. So the whole thing about Women’s Aid was not just about providing services for women but the whole ethos of creating different expectations, different opportunities and living the model of what women could be, in a way.” In her personal life, Nicola has been in a happy and equal relationship for many years. She feels that a personal factor that motivated her towards Women’s Aid was the belief that: “every woman should have... the right to be in a relationship where she is treated with equality and respect... I’m lucky enough to have a good quality relationship and other women have a right to it too... part of my work is to try to create a situation where women are able to take up those rights to have whatever relationships they want on a basis of equality and respect...”

Through her work and in her personal life, Nicola has known two women who were murdered by a former partner, and where children also lost their lives, and this has affected her deeply and strengthens her commitment to Women’s Aid. She points out that domestic violence is actually very common and that two women are killed each week by a partner or former partner. Nicola also points out how difficult it is to escape a violent relationship. For instance many women feel they have to stay in contact with an abuser if there are children involved, as they have to make arrangements for visiting rights and are afraid the children could be abducted if they refuse these. “The continuing need to have contact or make contact in relation to children is probably one of the main factors in homicides of women and indeed of children who are killed...” She also stresses that not all domestic violence is obvious: “You can even have friends who are in abusive relationships and that may not be something [they tell you]. Even if you think you know all about them.”

In terms of the impact of the 'second wave', Nicola doesn't feel we've entered a 'post-feminist' period where many goals have been secured, instead she feels that although: "...the last thirty years have mainstreamed women's equality issues" there has also been a bit of a backlash". For instance: "there's a backlash on domestic violence really... worried that we're going too far and what about all the poor men, are they suffering silently somewhere even though statistically there's nothing that bears evidence to that..." On the plus side, she points out that: "There's a lot of women in the government ... who were part of the 1970's and 1980's and the women's movement. To a certain degree the feminist agenda is there. The equality issue is there within government and isn't going to go away." She feels that: "No-one would consider saying we don't need to have refuge provision. Even things like recognition of the problem of how rape and sexual assault is dealt with, issues like date-rape, a lot of issues have got onto the policy agenda and won't leave it. Whether or not they are high enough up it and whether the resources attached to it are being delivered is a different question."

Nicola points out that the changes in attitudes to domestic violence are indicative of general societal changes in attitudes to women: "One of the ways of looking at it is that when the Women's Aid Federation of England set up in 1974 we tried to register as a charity and our preamble was about recognising that domestic violence is a result of the general position of women in society. Nobody now would query that. Of course domestic violence is about women's position in society, it's about women's status and it's about discrimination and inequality. In 1974 we couldn't become a charity because the charity commission said we were too political [and that our preamble was] a political statement not a factual statement. It took us until 1996 to become a charity." Nicola feels this example is illustrative of the fact that: "... value systems and common sense understandings and what is understood to be 'truths' changed significantly during the [second wave] period... Women's Aid couldn't be a charity in '74 because domestic violence wasn't anything to do with women's equality and why was women's equality an issue anyway? You see parallel things for children's rights because it wasn't until 1993 that there was a convention about elimination of discrimination against children...so it's taken right up to the mid 90's at international level for human rights issues in relation to women and in relation to children to be recognised... through women working all the way round the world both at grassroots level and also pushing at the UN... In those thirty years we have put women's rights, women's human rights on an international agenda... despite the fact that they have been abused... the agenda is not going to go away." In terms of the achievements of Women's Aid, Nicola feels that: "What we've achieved is a national network of services, we've got a lot of challenges in terms of funding and in terms of service delivery. What we've achieved is that a woman has a right to leave home if she's experiencing domestic violence and go and stay somewhere that is of a reasonable standard where she doesn't have to share a room with another woman and her children. Just in terms of those things I think they are measures of expectations and rights that we've achieved... We got improved legislation in the 1990's in terms of women's housing rights and in terms of legal protection under the criminal law and under the civil law and that's moving on and it's a continuing agenda."

Nicola feels that: "...the second wave of feminism was a kind of accelerated period... We've got a legacy of campaigners from 100 years before and from 50 years before... We built on the legacy of women who've gone before but I think it's been a

tremendous acceleration.” She does point out that: “... the goal posts keep getting moved... even things like the development of information and communication technologies... on one level it’s positive and we can utilise that network globally to collect research and evidence to be able to argue and campaign but equally the internet also becomes a place whereby women’s degradation and exploitation is actually furthered... However much you meet one set of challenges there is always another new set to meet.”

Interviewed by Iona Singer

HELEN HASTE



Helen Haste is Professor of Psychology at Bath University. She considers that her main feminist involvements have been her numerous books and publications on psychology relating to gender and feminist issues, teaching women's studies extra-mural classes, being part of the *Half the Sky* collective, and broadcasting on gender issues. She was involved in early consciousness raising groups and she helped to set up the Feminist Archive.

Helen is the eldest of four children. She was born in Devizes, Wiltshire. Her parents were both the first graduates in their families. Her father was a civil engineer and her mother worked as a geography and general studies teacher in schools and FE colleges. Helen remembers her family placing an emphasis on working hard and having a professional career. The family moved to Australia in the post-war period. There were good job opportunities in Australia but her parents weren't happy there, and after seven years decided to move back to England. For Helen, this period was important in fostering self-reliance and experiencing different cultures. On the way back to England the Suez crisis meant the family had to take a detour through Cape Town. Helen was totally shocked at the overt racism she witnessed there: "I was thirteen years old and I was deeply horrified by 'whites only' signs and 'blacks only' signs, the clear differentiation on the basis of race. I was very upset by this and it sowed the seeds of a very passionate anger about issues and equality". Helen feels the anger she experienced about the visible manifestations of racial prejudice in Cape Town fired her later concerns about inequality and discrimination.

Helen spent the rest of her childhood in Bristol and at eighteen went to Manchester University to study English, with the intention of becoming a journalist. Whilst at Manchester, she became involved in student politics and also in CND, which was then a very live issue. Helen had some exam results she describes as "fairly disastrous" and became pregnant. She married, and dropped out of Manchester at the end of her second year. She moved to London with her husband where she had her daughter and spent a year re-assessing herself and her life, after which she began a psychology degree at the University of London and has since been mostly employed in academia.

Helen remembers having a strong sense of equality from an early age. At age eight she took part in a school debate where she defended co-education as a way of

preventing boys and girls being frightened of each other. Helen describes her involvement with CND whilst at university as: "... a very powerful education in politics". She also feels that her progressive family background was at odds with the world in which she found herself: "I was brought up with the unthinking assumption that I would be able to do whatever I wanted, and fairly early on I discovered that girls were not expected to do as well as boys, and that there were costs involved in being what was then still called a bluestocking." Nonetheless when the women's movement began Helen did not initially feel it was for her: "...I didn't perceive myself as experiencing discrimination as a woman... I approved of the women's movement but it didn't touch me personally at that point". Helen feels this was a common view among young women at the time with successful careers. A turning point for her was when a close friend chose to have an abortion. Although abortion was legal, it was necessary to have medical support to make a case of 'need' or 'distress'. "It was very distressing. It seemed that psychiatrists were playing God ... It suddenly dawned on me that irrespective of any professional or academic qualifications we were still just gendered bodies."

Helen started to become more aware of language and cultural symbols (a topic she has since written about extensively) and she saw profound discrimination in this area: "It had been very much a part of my childhood, realising that whatever I read, the pronoun was always 'he', [clichés like] 'every schoolboy knows'. Our great scientists, all of whom seemed to be men, our writers, are described as if they are all male. It wasn't a world in which I felt I belonged." Helen realised she wanted to become involved with the women's movement and in 1971, she went to a major WLM demonstration at Acton Town Hall. She describes this as being: "... a very exciting and uplifting experience". She also became involved in a consciousness-raising group and attended demonstrations and conferences, but it was largely separate from her professional life as a lecturer at Bath University. In 1974 Helen began to question her grassroots involvements as she: "...began to realise that I could do an awful lot more for the women's movement if I did some decent research. So I began to do research on stereotypes, and on the consequences of discrimination on motivation... I did studies on the image of science amongst boys and girls and began to publish academic articles... I remained involved in political activism ... but I felt the best thing I could do was to offer my real talents which were essentially intellectual, research-type talents".

Helen became involved with summer school teaching at the Open University (in addition to her work at Bath University) as it had a reputation of being enlightened and progressive with regard to gender issues. From 1974-1980 she taught on their social science foundation course summer school which included a module on sex and gender. Helen feels positive about her involvement with the OU: "The OU summer schools must have reached thousands of people over those years. I encouraged all my academic friends to get involved... not only spreading the word but also doing it in a way which was highly credible, backed up by scientific material and in a context where people could engage with debate and discussion." Helen found it interesting to challenge the stereotypes that some OU students initially had about feminist women: "I remember one particular year I wore a long Laura Ashley skirt and an elegant top, and a fair amount of make-up, and I said gentle things to this fresh faced crowd of OU students... I got the feedback later 'Helen is so aggressive'. I thought, this really *is* stereotyping in process! I was certainly not being aggressive. I was being as

feminine as possible in the situation. But I was a woman in authority, so the conventional image kicked in for them”.

In the early seventies Helen became involved with a group of other feminist women in setting up women’s studies (extra mural) courses in Bristol and the surrounding area, with the help of Liz Bird who became director of extra-mural studies at Bristol University. These were very popular: the group thought there should be more collections of feminist materials, so they became a collective who put together a reader called *Half the Sky*. Helen describes her experience: “... it was the only time in my life when I’ve worked in a real collective and it was a very *interesting experience*, not one I particularly want to repeat but very interesting. We became very close friends and learned a lot about ourselves and each other”. The book was published in 1979. At that time Helen was also involved in a consciousness raising group. She has mixed feelings about what she gained from this: “We were at very different levels of consciousness and we brought very different kinds of experience. I think it would have helped me at that time to get involved with a group who were more politically oriented than that group were. Looking back, I’m not sure if I was denying, and defending myself against it, or whether it wasn’t quite the right group for me. But I learned a lot about women and also how difficult it is to confront some issues”. After her first marriage ended in 1977 Helen moved to Bath where she became involved with the Feminist Archive. She found the Archive a (temporary) home at Bath University Library, donated materials to it and was also involved in raising money for it.

In terms of the achievements of the ‘second wave’ period, Helen cites the Ruskin conference of 1970 as being very important, although she did not attend as she was not at that point ‘engaged’ with feminism. She did attend the meeting at Acton town hall in 1971 and feels that was a very important meeting. Helen also remembers a major pro-choice rally in 1975 which achieved important media coverage at the time. Women’s voices began to be heard through a range of public movements and events. The Greenham Common women’s peace camp, much later, was extremely important. “Women were making a commitment as peace activists and as women symbolically using feminine images, feminine metaphors, again part of the process of finding a new identity for the feminine as well as confronting a longstanding peace issue.”

She also now sees Germaine Greer’s 1971 bestseller *The Female Eunuch* as a key text, although many socialist feminists did not see it as such at the time: “We all thought [the book] was a sell-out. In fact, it was actually discussing things in terms of culture, symbolism and language, so in some ways it was ahead of its time. But Germaine Greer did not write a Marxist tract, and in the early seventies we were very into Marxist tracts. We could see the publicity value of what she’d done, but at the same time we were quite resentful. We were all working our socks off to get some decent theory and decent ideology worked out and then she romps away with an incredible best-seller that in our view distorted the issues and trivialised them, and was unconnected to consciousness-raising groups and to socialist theory...”

Helen describes the impact of the WLM at the time: “... it was becoming *normal* to be involved in feminist issues. Increasingly all kinds of women were writing, speaking, teaching, engaging in it. It just occupied your whole life. Everything you did was tuned into feminist issues.” Helen points out that discernible strands of

feminism began to emerge: “Much of the drive at that time [i.e. early 1970’s] came from women who were looking at the problems in terms of socialist theory and solutions. In those days, beliefs about inherent biological sexual inequality were still being used to justify discrimination, and we were working out ways in which this situation and these beliefs were supported by the state. Our general ethos then was that, if you changed the law, and changed what were accepted as legal economic and personnel practices, the problem would go away, which of course it didn’t. So this first wave of activity was geared to what I’d call socialist feminism. Then there emerged what might be called a ‘cultural feminist’ perspective, when people began to realise that changing patterns of behaviour and attitudes wasn’t going to be done just with legislation... We also had to look at the deeper cultural things - how we use language and symbols, how they reproduce beliefs, values, motives. At the same time, in parallel, there were emerging issues of lesbian identity, which was an important part of radical feminism. Women who were lesbians were touched more deeply by the personal side of gender issues, because not only did they experience economic oppression, they were also oppressed by society’s incomprehension of the diversity of female sexuality. The rise of radical feminism and separatist feminism... was an important part of recognising that identity, not only economy, was an issue”. Helen points out that these separate strands of feminism were emerging and working in parallel, but it is much easier now, looking back, to view them as distinct and separate perspectives: “...in the 70’s we didn’t realise with the clarity that we do now that socialist feminism was quite different from liberal feminism, quite different again from radical feminism and quite different again from what I would call cultural feminism...”

Helen feels that in terms of the achievements of the period, legislation was only part of the battle. She believes that: “Really it was a slow process of attrition, of making normal, making commonplace, what had been seen initially as way out, wacky, even deluded, feminist arguments. The rhetoric against feminism in the early days was horrendous. It’s funny how long it lasted actually.” Helen cites a recent example: “Only a few years ago my university issued a pamphlet about equal opportunities and anti-discrimination. Two total idiots in one of the administrative departments who thought they were being funny sent round a frivolous email that perpetuated the old quip about one-legged black lesbians.” Helen is also quick to point out that equality is still to be achieved. Although some professions have dramatically increased the proportion of women members, “most senior doctors, lawyers, scientists and administrators are still men... [only] 8% of professors are female, and even with an increasing number of junior women, university lecturers are still overwhelmingly male.”

Helen points out that: “There are also more widespread issues for women in general... what about the provisions for ordinary life? Is childcare adequate? No. Have we yet moved to a position where the management of the working day, working week, or year is parent friendly? No, not yet. We are not just talking about people who are held back from high-flying profession careers because they can’t do full time work

with children. We should be asking; in the factory, in the office, or in any workplace, is it comfortable to be a working mother? No - we haven't solved that one. We haven't solved the problems of basic economic inequality. I think we've got a long way to go to achieve real equality for the sexes so the battle isn't over yet but its changed an awful lot and there's much more diversity in how the problems are analysed and what solutions are being offered. I think also that there have been other important changes recently. We have long ago stopped thinking only about the 'problems of women and girls'. We recognise that life has to be different for boys and men, and we are beginning – now – to tackle that”

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

SARAH HIPPERSON

Sarah lives in London. Her main feminist involvements include being a peace protestor and resident of Greenham Common women's peace camp for eight years. She was also involved in the protests at Aldermaston against the manufacture of nuclear missiles and has been in prison over twenty times as a result of her involvement in non-violent direct action. Sarah co-ordinated and fundraised for the development of the former peace camp into a memorial site called 'New Greenham Park' which was inaugurated in 2002.

Sarah was born in the east end of Glasgow in 1927. She was a teenager during the Second World War. After the war ended, Sarah became a nurse and a midwife in Glasgow. In 1950 she emigrated to Canada where she worked as a nurse, got married and had five children. She returned to England with her husband and family in 1967/8 and went to live in Wanstead in East London which she describes as 'a nice leafy suburb'. Soon after moving to Wanstead, Sarah became a magistrate as she was drawn to issues of social justice. However, she found that she was involved with a process which often conflicted with her ideals: "I saw... how the benches operated when they came up against vulnerable people, poor people. I literally despised the fact that people were being supposedly tried by their peers but eventually one came to realise that these were very middle class values that were being tested on these people and that they [the magistrates] were made up of bankers and teachers and the grey pinstripe lot and their good lady wives. That's who were judging people and I just couldn't cope with that and I was always being outvoted..." She gives an example of a woman who had been sexually harassed by the owner of a hotel she stayed at and had consequently left without paying her bill. However "two policemen arrived at her door, [she was] a single mother, they forced their way in and when she tried to resist she was charged with assaulting police officers. On this particular case the chairman of the bench said 'what does a woman like you, living the way you do, expect?' There was another case of a young black man who was arrested for supposedly carrying a concealed weapon when all it was, was a penknife... That was another case I couldn't cope with so I left."

Sarah's decision to cease being a magistrate was also influenced by her growing commitment to peace campaigning. She joined CND when she moved to Wanstead and regularly went on peace marches. In 1979 she read about the placing of cruise missiles on Greenham common and she decided to 'accelerate' her activities. She was a founder member of a campaigning group called Catholic Peace Action. She got together with a friend and showed a film called 'Critical Mass' (a film made in 1980 where a medical doctor called Helen Caldicott talks about the dangers of the nuclear threat to life and civilisation), to young mothers to alert them to the issue of cruise missiles. Sarah invited clergy from the 25 churches in Wanstead and neighbouring Woodford to come to a peace campaign meeting, but their reaction was disappointing: "Only 4 turned up and I felt at the time that they might have thought they were going to be shown blue movies or something because their reaction was very strange. They were very careful around me. I think they hadn't actually come up against anyone initiating something and taking it on in the community." At this time, Sarah didn't have any great experience at organising campaigns but to her "it just seemed the right thing to do". She started travelling with other women down to Greenham on the

coach in 1982. She particularly remembers attending a gathering there in 1982 called 'Festival of Life' where she made up her mind that she would play a large part in the peace movement and become resident at Greenham. She describes her decision thus: "I was going to clear the decks, hand stuff over to my children to do their own care and attention and I would make my way down to Greenham and take part in that. [However] I didn't get there 'til 1983...my sister was very ill in Glasgow... and I went up there to nurse her. I needed to be clear that I'd done everything I needed to do before I went."

Sarah became fully involved in 1983 when there was a court case involving an injunction taken out against twenty-one women at the camp. This was an attempt by the authorities to clear the camp because they believed that the women would lose heart and the camp would disperse. However Sarah describes how the court case aroused much interest and support: "I think about four hundred women attended and it was quite an empowering thing. The whole of the centre of the Strand was full of women of great colour, feathers in their hair, all sorts of enlivened dress that I hadn't actually come across myself really because I would have been in my mid-fifties at the time." The women took with them a signed affidavit saying they considered Greenham to be their home. Sarah added the words "my spiritual and temporal home" as she knew she was about to become resident at the camp. Sarah used her experience as a magistrate to become involved in the court proceedings: "I'd had enough experience to know what was going on behind the scenes and I thought to myself all those affidavits are going to be put in the bin so I insisted that the names were all called out. I know some people thought 'who is she?' but these opportunities come but once in a lifetime and you have to grab them when you recognise it." There was a meeting after the court case and the women realised it was necessary that more people became resident at the camp to replace the women who had been the subject of the injunctions. Sarah immediately "...left the courtroom, phoned family [to say] I'm on my way down to Greenham. I am needed there." Once at the camp however, she found the adjustment quite difficult: "... it was so cold. It was the beginning of March and we were living under a piece of black plastic slung between two trees and [the women] were like sardines, they were head to toe under there and at night time the ground was absolutely freezing. I thought to myself I've made this grand gesture and I'm not going to be able to carry it out." Sarah retreated to London for a couple of days where she: "...spent a few days just thinking about it. I was so...grabbed by the whole notion that I felt I must go down again so I...went down for a few weeks and then I'd come back again...after about a month I went and bought myself a tent and some water-proof clothing and went down and lived there."

Sarah found Greenham to be "the most astounding place"; she describes how "...great discussions went on. There was the issue of separatism, there were also issues of spirituality, sexuality, all sorts of things and the bluntness of the discussion could really offend... I stuck with it because I understood it was part of the sorting out that women were seeking, to bring about change. I knew that instinctively...that not only were women discussing it all in an analytical way but they were actually trying to put it into action and it was sometimes incredibly bold what was attempted really and although I didn't go along with it all the time you had to admire the audaciousness of Greenham because it really struck out from the positions we'd all been brought up in." Sarah recalls that the discussions at Greenham were a very important part of the experience: "Prejudices were aired and things that you perhaps

carried prejudices about in society but wouldn't dare mention were mentioned there. So it was incredibly honest if painful sometimes." Another important aspect of Greenham was that women put themselves in a position to challenge authority. This was particularly important for Sarah as: "One of the things that I'd recognised from being a magistrate was the fact that we'd all been constrained by authority, legally as well as sociologically and it was now an opportunity for women and I was quite excited by this..." Sarah feels that at this stage in her life, she was ready for a "clash with the law" and she became involved in non-violent direct action. For a time, her life revolved around: "taking non-violent direct action, being arrested, going to court, challenging the law and ending up in prison... everybody was doing it but I took it personally as my particular contribution to bring about change." Sarah points out that different women had different views about what form their action should take. For example some women preferred not to get arrested. But the women at 'yellow gate' (the most politically active of the different gates at Greenham) where she spent most of her time were very committed to active strategies to impede the military activities at the base. In 1983 (on American Independence Day!) the women brought bolt cutters to the camp (using the code phrase 'black cardigans' to communicate this to women outside the camp!) to cut down the wire fencing. They took part in a series of protests before the missiles arrived and two thousand women from all over the country came and helped to take down five miles of fence. Sarah was involved in getting women from Glasgow to come to the camp to take part and many of the other women at the camp returned to their home towns and cities to speak about what was going on. The action caught the military completely unawares and an American soldier visiting the camp in 1999 recalled the action and how the military were actually told to get into their bunkers as the women were taking over the camp!

Sarah lived at the camp most of the time between 1983 and 1989. In 1997 the INF treaty was signed which meant that the missiles were no longer to be based at Greenham. Many of the women began to leave the camp believing that they had done all they could and that the success of the camp meant that the military had had to abandon their original plans for it. In 1987 Sarah had a 'banning order' put on her to keep her away from Greenham as she was charged with conspiring to incite people to come to Greenham. She points out that this was ridiculous because: "No-one who was there needed any encouragement from anyone else. They were there on their own terms, but it was a good charge for them to bring to the courts to get me off Greenham Common." Sarah was away from Greenham for three months but when the case came to court she agreed not to take any more action if she was allowed back to the camp: "I agreed not to take action because I felt I'd done everything I could but I wanted in some way to be the housekeeper whilst other women took action... so I could set other women free to do what they wanted to do and I could hold the camp." However, in 1989 a young woman called Helen Thomas was killed at the camp and the women were devastated. Sarah felt that she "...just couldn't tolerate it, it was too heartbreaking to be there knowing she'd lost her life through being at Greenham. It was quite clear in my mind that she was killed by a West Midlands police horsebox driving too fast into an area where she was standing quite safe. In my mind heart and soul I know they said to one another 'Oh we're coming up to Greenham, there's one of those bloody women. Let's give her a buzz'... They drove too close to her and the wing mirror was low because it was a horsebox and there were four big horses in it and it just clipped the top of her head and she went under the wheels... we all lived with that. It was a dreadful, dreadful experience... She lost her life simply because

she chose to be involved with Greenham Common.” After Helen was killed there was a difficult time for Sarah and the rest of the women: “The camp was in great flux at the time and we were not working ourselves out very well and I figured that the missiles were going and that I would go after the missiles went.” Sarah left in August 1990 and became involved in the campaign against war in the gulf in 1991 where she became part of a peace camp outside the Foreign Office and was again arrested and sent to court. She also became involved in the protests at Aldermaston where Trident warheads were being manufactured. Sarah describes the Aldermaston protests: “It became the same thing again...cutting down fences, entering Aldermaston, getting arrested and going to prison... I was in prison on twenty different occasions for different periods of my life. It was just part of the life... You wake up in the morning in Greenham, in Holloway, in Cookham Wood and then I used to fast all the time [in prison] so I’d have a period of recovery in London before I’d go back to camp again, so it was a way of life.”

Sarah is proud of the success of Greenham and the women’s peace movement and she points out that many of the legal victories were not well publicised: “The first one was in 1985... having failed to get rid of the women through injunctions and evictions...they decided they would deny us the vote...they wanted to close down the camp and perceived that if they could prove that we didn’t have an address legally then we could be in the same position as travellers or gypsies.” She points out that this campaign had an ideological function as well: “Already you’ve established in the press that these women are less worthy than... you can do what you like with them. If you look back in history to what happened to Jews in Austria... I’m not saying they went that far with us, but the same psychology was used to get people to turn against the women. They [i.e. the women protestors] were different from, they were other than... Therefore whatever happened to them shouldn’t concern the general public...” Sarah describes the next stage of this campaign: “...they took away the vote from us through the electoral court in Newbury but we fought our way back and eventually ended up in the High Court... and we had the vote not only given back to us but we also had an established address. So they shot themselves in the foot on that one!” The other major court victory was when trespass was made a criminal offence in 1990 and the women actually won the case at the House of Lords where it was deemed that the anti-trespass law was invalid. The ‘yellow gate women’ also tried to have the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons declared unlawful and this went to court in 1990. Sarah was heavily involved in this and although there was a hung jury, she “came to the conclusion that this country would never rule that nuclear weapons were illegal as... no-one in the country has the right to challenge the military...” Sarah regards the court action as “a long exercise to discover that, but nevertheless, I would do the same thing again even knowing that, because since it is the only way of challenging nuclear weapons, it must be that you do it by non-violent direct action. By challenging authority and by putting yourself in a way where you say I will not be encompassed by these details.”

The camp closed in September 2000, nineteen years after the women had first arrived. The small number of women left at the end (many, like Sarah became involved in other actions for peace), and the fact that the military were no longer using the base formed part of the decision to close the camp. Sarah was involved in the campaign to build a commemorative site to honour the peace campaigning that went on there. “We put together a presentation and we presented it to Newbury District Council and

they were quite astonished really. Actually it's another bit of audaciousness that we have done this... It took us about two years before we had convinced them that it would be a good thing not only for the women's peace camp but for the area. They had such a bad history of compliance with the government having conceded to put 96 ground launch missiles there. They wanted to clean up their history a bit so they will work on it with us... giving planning permission to build this site. We had to collect and raise all the money ourselves". Sarah describes a sculpture that has been commissioned to form a centrepiece at the site: "We have engaged a sculptor who has done a fire sculpture representing the fire that we all sat around with seven standing stones. [There is] also a spiral giving the message of continuity, reaching out, still there and that is made of fine steel and stone from the new forest and it will have a solar panel on top and water will run through it. Around the spiral it will say 'women's peace camp 1981-2000, you can't kill the spirit'. There is also a garden to honour Helen Thomas who was killed at the camp." The new development of the former camp, now called New Greenham Park, was inaugurated in October 2002. Sarah sums up the change; "We are now offering this peace area to the people of Newbury. The land itself where missiles trundled through is now grazed on by cattle. It is truly what one could say if you were Christian and believed in Isaiah [a case of] swords into plough shares".

Interview conducted by Viv Honeybourne and written up by Ilona Singer.

JULEY HOWARD



Juley Howard currently works as a development worker for 'North Somerset Against Domestic Abuse' where she supports women affected by violence in relationships. She was resident at the Greenham Women's Peace Camp in Berkshire for three and a half years and has been imprisoned nine times for non-violent direct action at the camp. She also supports women prisoners by letter writing and petitioning. She has been involved in the Bristol Women's Centre and the Women's Project, which is a charitable project for women in North Somerset.

Juley grew up in Rugby where her father was an engineer for the General Electric Company and her mother was a housewife who supplemented her income with cleaning work on the nearby canal boats. Juley describes her mother as quite a "traditional" woman with local family connections. Juley was the eldest in a family of three girls. Juley and her sisters attended a local girl's grammar and were the first in the family to be 'educated'. Juley describes her school as being "very nice", and she was quite happy there. Juley's father described himself as a "working class Tory" and he read the 'Daily Mail' newspaper. From the age of ten, Juley immersed herself in current affairs via the 'Daily Mail' (although she points out that this was hardly an unbiased read!). Juley began to be concerned about international politics and the state of the world: "It sort of dawned on me in my early teens just how unfair the world was. My mum had always said stuff like "eat your food up there are people starving" and you know what kids are like, they don't really care until suddenly something affects you...it dawned on me that there was this massive arms race going on while all these people were starving in other countries and I became more politically aware, although I was still quite influenced by the Daily Mail and my family". Juley began to try to make a difference; "I would send my pocket money to relief organisations because I felt so terrible that I'd try to do everything I could to pass money on from what I saw as the wealthy nations.. it was only in a small way, I probably never sent more than a couple of quid at a time but I was very conscious of the differences." Juley's grammar school was also a politicising influence in that; "there were people who's older brothers and sisters belonged to CND and 'ultra radical' organisations like that-or so I thought at the time" and she was encouraged to think about wider social issues.

Juley regards being born into a family of girls as a factor that influenced her growing awareness of gender issues: "I think they had aspirations for us that they wouldn't have had if one of us had been a boy. The boy would have been the one they'd thought of as going to university but...they had three bright girls so they were like 'All my girls are going to university' and there wasn't the gender differentiation that there would have been if one of us had been a boy". Juley feels that she was allowed different hobbies and interests than if she'd had a brother; "I did stuff like carpentry and kept chickens... I was the surrogate son in a way. I used to go off with him [her father] when he went places and went cross country running with him". At this point, although her dad used to jokingly refer to his daughters as being "feminists", Juley was still more interested in politics than gender issues: "It was only when I lived at Greenham that I realised how everything linked up really." Juley had been reading about the women at Greenham Common in the Daily Mail where they were given a very bad press; "I'd been reading about the horrendous Greenham women and how they hung their tampons and sanitary towels on the fence and abandoned their children and I just thought they were totally awful but...I'd got to the point where I was so adamantly anti-nuclear, not because I thought the world was necessarily going to end but because it was such a waste of money... any opportunity to go on a demonstration against nuclear weapons I'd have gone on". Juley was involved with Rugby CND which organised a minibus down to Greenham in December 1983 which Juley went on: "It was the second 'embrace the base' not the big first one but it was very big and in fact out of all of the people who went I was the youngest as I was sixteen at the time." Out of the fourteen people from Rugby who went to visit the base, there wasn't a woman available to drive the minibus; "... so we had to have a bloke and he went to the café for the day and picked us up in the end, skulking in the corner." Juley feels her family were probably; "... a bit outraged really, but they didn't say anything about things like that so I just told them I was going to Greenham Common for a day." The experience proved a life-changing one; "... it was an amazing experience to see all these women completely running riot and all these blokes sort of shutting their cage which was this military base... I was fascinated to actually meet real women from Greenham and realise that maybe some of the things the Daily Mail said about them were true, but I thought they were brilliant, I really felt they were doing the right thing". Before she left that day, Juley got involved in some action to pull down a piece of the fence and she became very firm friends with one of the other women involved who she had travelled in the minibus with. They are still friends nearly twenty years later and Juley met many other interesting and supportive women friends during her time at the camp.

Juley points out that not all the women at Greenham welcomed visitors, some of them: "...looked at us like we were trash because we were just visiting for the day. I'm sure I was like that too when people were just visiting for the day and I'd been there for a month and never had a break or a shower. It was a very hard environment but I used to try to be a bit nicer than people were to me." However, many women were friendly and supportive. At Christmas 1983 Juley used her Christmas money to go down to Greenham for the day. She left her parents a note, went to Greenham and walked all the way round the base. She went down again at February half term and spent six weeks there over the summer. In the autumn she returned to school to continue her A levels and realised she was wasn't happy there as she was totally committed to the peace camp. Juley went to live at Greenham full time in 1984 when

she was seventeen. Initially Juley lived at “Orange Gate” as the people there were welcoming to her. The “Orange Gate” was also perceived as the “nice” gate and Juley describes it thus: “They sang a lot and did a lots of music and many people from Wales went there ... it wasn’t the whole picture though. A lot of women used to come up from London and drink a lot at the weekends and there would be drunk women around the fire by 11 o’clock and it would be annoying when you lived there and wanted to get on with opposing the base that people would just come up and party for the weekend and it made you realise why other people didn’t like visitors very much”. All the different gates had specific reputations and different types of women camping there. She moved gates many times depending on what kinds of activities and people she wanted to be with: “I lived at different gates at different times depending on whether I wanted to be in the thick of political activities or whether I disagreed with someone’s political line and wanted to go and be at a different gate where people had a different perspective on things”. Juley was also very keen on participating in non-violent direct action against the base and she spent a lot of time at the “Yellow Gate” where much of this activity was organised.

Juley had gone to Greenham because she was passionately anti-nuclear and that remained her main motivation: “I hadn’t gone because it was a women’s peace camp. I’d gone there originally because I opposed nuclear missiles and that stayed with me the whole time I was there, although I liked living at a women’s peace camp and would never have supported it being mixed.” She points out that class issues were also very important at Greenham: “Greenham was really the place where class politics played itself out. People would go on about the women at Blue Gate and how “awful” they were... why did people say that? Because they were young, working class and into animal rights type stuff”. In contrast the women at “Orange Gate” were “... sort of vicars’ wives and had nice families at home and lived in nice houses and had nice jobs as social workers and things...” At one time the “Violet Gate” was regarded as being mostly composed of heterosexual women, many of whom spent their time chatting up the squaddies! Juley found out that her father told his friends that; “... the women I lived with at camp weren’t like the other women there. They were Christians and they went to church! [He would say] “My daughter’s living at the Christian gate, you must understand”... it was just so awful that I’d want to live at this terrible place but he was trying to make it out as nicely as he could for his drinking friends!”

Juley describes day-to-day life at the camp as being quite hard: “When I first lived there, there weren’t any evictions, but then the evictions started and most of us who lived there used to try to take them in our stride and not let them take over our lives but other people would get totally stressed by them. The evictions had a terrible effect really, everything had to be mobile... you couldn’t leave your tent up. Even if it was pouring with rain you had to take your tent down and pack up all your bedding. Several times all my stuff got taken by the bailiffs, even when I was there... they’d just thump you and take your stuff and shove it in the back of a dustcart and they did that when I was doing my A levels to all my textbooks. It was awful.” The bailiffs could be particularly obstructive and unkind when they wanted to be, as Juley described: “... they just lost their temper and took all my stuff and wouldn’t give it back for days. It was February and it was snowing and I had no tent and no sleeping bags and they’d issue those notices saying they’d only give our stuff back by appointment two days a week... they’d taken my money and my clothes. I hadn’t

even got dressed properly”. Also they had to collect their water daily from different points around the camp: “If we hadn’t got a vehicle, it would be very difficult. We’d have to wait for some nice visitor to come along and be very nice to them and get them to go and collect the water.” The visitors and the general support the women received was vital to the running of the camp: “The support network made life a lot easier... At one point I was really against meals on wheels because I thought we should stand on our own two feet and cook for ourselves but really it kept the camp going a lot of the time.” She also remembers quite a lot of support from men: “... this bloke used to drive down from Worcestershire to Newbury with a load of logs for us. He wanted to chop them up for us but there was always some woman with an axe who preferred to chop wood than watch someone else”. She also met an Irishman on a train who lived in rural Berkshire and he used to come to the camp to visit and help out: “He used to go to the bakery the day after and he’d buy us loads of old bread and doughnuts and things for £1 and bring them up to the camp and we’d have toasted jam doughnuts for breakfast and lunch and tea. Lots of men gave us a lot of support.” All the gates were women only after dark and one gate (“Green Gate”) was women only during the day.

Juley was arrested many times for direct action and served nine prison sentences. Sometimes she was expecting to be arrested and other times it seemed to be fairly arbitrary: “I remember one time I was just putting my bedding out to dry in the sun and I got arrested ... and the weather changed in the night and I came back and all my stuff was soaked... Sometimes things would just happen and you’d just do something and you’d just get arrested. Other times we’d been plotting for weeks, months even... [for] some really complicated thing to throw a spanner in the works and get arrested. A lot of the time we just got away with things and I went through a long phase where I would deliberately try to push things and make it as expensive as possible so they’d go over budget. But the military always has a lot of money though.” The activities that Juley did were things like; “... painting peace slogans on walls or vehicles to try to make things difficult for them so they’d have to stop and repaint their vehicles in the morning... we used to think as creatively as possible and do things to make life difficult.” Once Juley tried to attend a church service to point out the immorality of having religious worship on a nuclear missiles base: “I got a friend to cut a hole in the fence so I didn’t get muddy or anything as I was wearing my Sunday best and I just blatantly walked along the street. A police van drove past me and I went into the church and I’m sure I would have got away with it except the church was being refurbished ... Anyway, I got arrested and did quite a nice court case around it and they let me question my arresting officer in court and I asked if he was a Christian ... he said he was and I asked him about whether it was ethical as a Christian to defend a nuclear weapons base.” Juley did many court cases like this and she would always try to engage people in debate about the moral issues around having cruise missiles: “My point of view was just to harass them as much as possible, to make it as difficult for them and as uncomfortable for them morally as well as having to spend as much money as possible. We made very good friends with some of the MoD policemen. One MoD policeman invited me to his family for Christmas lunch one year. It wasn’t like they all hated us. Some of them really did hate us ... but others were open to dialogue, but then I don’t suppose they did very well in the Ministry of Defence police!”

Juley left Greenham in 1987 although she continued to spend a lot of time at the base. She left to do a Theology degree at Bristol University after having done her A levels at the camp whilst attending evening classes in Newbury. Juley describes her decision to go to Bristol thus: "Whilst living at the camp I made friends with women from all over the country and I picked the five towns where I knew nice women and I'd like to live because I already had friends there." Juley received interest from all the universities and she feels this was because; "... I had quite a lot of opinions and was prepared to argue my case and was quite an unusual type of person to go on a Theology course I suppose." She picked Bristol as they seemed to be the least interested in her as a peace protester and treated her as if she were a run of the mill applicant. Juley felt this made getting into Bristol more of a challenge. She lived in Bristol for about nine years and was involved in the Women's Centre as a volunteer. She describes the day to day work of the Women's Centre thus: "...most of the women who contacted us wanted to borrow a library book or have a cup of tea or just get a telephone number of a woman plumber... nothing life changing but every day I was there somebody would phone up with some sort of crucial problem. They'd phone because they'd been raped by a work colleague or their sister was having a nervous breakdown or somebody was homeless or they were homeless... something important that they really needed help with and there was nobody else they could turn to."

In 1996 Juley moved to Leeds. She describes this move as "a disaster" and she came back down to Bristol and was homeless for a short period of time before finding a home to rent in Yatton where she has lived happily for the last five years. Juley now works for North Somerset Against Domestic Abuse (also known as NADA) as a development worker. The project offers listening and support to help women in violent relationships. She is also involved with a local charity called the Women's Project in Weston Super Mare. NADA has three year funding from the health authority and the local council. "My job as development worker is to offer individual women information and support... I try to keep it as open as possible and do my best to do whatever anybody wants really, because its no good me just giving people a list of telephone numbers or a leaflet. People need someone to talk to..." Juley feels that just telling people to leave violent relationships isn't enough and you have to be able to give continued support and be realistic about what it will be like for them if and when they do leave. She finds that by being sympathetic, understanding and practical she is often able to give people the support to make their own decision to leave a violent relationship: "... I'd been talking to this woman for two hours ... to start with she said 'I'm just not going to leave him' and we talked and talked about it and eventually we came up with an action plan which she agreed to... I'm always reluctant to bring in personal experience at work but at some point I let my guard slip and said my dad was an alcoholic and she found that interesting because her husband's an alcoholic. Sometimes you have to use your personal experience don't you? And talk to people honestly and not have a professional barrier." Juley's role can be quite a diverse one: "I try to do whatever people want really, if they want a mobile phone or they want a lift to the solicitor's office or they just want to talk for two hours, that's fine, I'll do it... We've helped a lot of people in very practical ways and its also my job to report back on people's experiences of using services locally so when a housing officer shouts at somebody and chucks a form at them, I'll report that back and hopefully housing will agree to us coming in and changing things and suggesting that they don't shout at people who are seriously depressed because of

domestic violence...” However Juley is sad that the project may not continue to receive funding after three years are up and she stresses the diverse types of experience that have helped her in her role at NADA; “I’ve served nine prison sentences as a teenager and young adult. It’s quite useful as I’ve met a wide variety of people. I’ve travelled a lot and met people all over the world in very different situations and its given me quite a good perspective on people’s lives and how they deal with things in their lives.”

Juley is very positive about the achievements that she was part of: “I feel like we got cruise missiles off Greenham Common... I thought it would take twenty years and it took nine years or something so I feel like that was quite an achievement but I don’t know whether the military would see it as we made them move their missiles or not.” She also points out that: “In a way, living at Greenham Common was a big thing, but in a way it’s a small thing compared with the size of the military world-wide.... The important thing is to work with other people and work towards a common goal.” She also points out that the Greenham women received a lot of media attention and really got people talking about the issues: “A lot of people were involved with Greenham, not that many lived there, probably a few hundred over the years but a lot of people went there and knew about it. It seemed to have a big impact on the media.” On the impact of Greenham personally Juley says: “I’ve become very argumentative and I don’t take no for an answer... Living at Greenham Common made me realise how easy it is to live in a house. I did my A levels at Greenham and when my step children talk about flunking their GCSE’s or if they even dare not to work as hard as they possibly could, I think for god’s sake it’s just so easy to live at home and have people supporting you... It’s so difficult to do your A levels when you are being evicted on a daily basis and living in a tent and the tutors are homophobic and they hate women from the camp and don’t want you in their class.” Juley also feels the Greenham experience has made her very anti-guns. On her son Dennis: “He knows that if his friends come in the garden with a water pistol I’ll throw them out and I’ll say no guns in here and they’ll treat me like I’m completely mad and I’ll lecture them about how many people have been killed by guns and go on at them and make them go on demonstrations.” Juley writes to women in prison and she has been writing to one particular woman (a political activist) since 1984. Juley feels that “there’s always people who need support and there are always small things like writing letters to people... even if you can’t get out there and riot on the streets (non violently of course) there’s always things you can do.” Juley intends to carry on being active and defending what she believes in but perhaps in a more low key way whilst her children are small. She is involved in local recycling and is a committed vegan as she doesn’t believe in harming animals in any way. She is also involved in trying to get a women’s centre established in Weston: “I’d like there to be more things for women, because you know at the end of the day a lot of people get treated very badly but it’s women at the end of the pile and if you can do something small for an individual woman ... you’ve done something for her but you’ve also done something for her kids and her family. Women don’t live in isolation.” Juley finished the interview by stating one of her core beliefs: “I think political activity starts on your doorstep... when times are hard, women are always the lowest of the low and need more support than anyone else. We need to support our sisters really, and ourselves.”

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

HILARY LAND



Hilary Land is Professor of Family Policy and Child Welfare at The School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. Her main feminist involvements have been: The Women's Financial and Legal Independence Campaign, the 'Why Be a Wife?' campaign, teaching courses on women's rights, benefits and legal issues for the WEA, teaching on Women's Studies extra mural courses for Bristol University, helping to develop the Family and Social Policy course and the MA in Gender and Social Policy for Bristol University. She also works for the Elizabeth Nuffield Trust which gives grants to women wanting to pursue education and career development.

Hilary grew up in Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, which was then a quiet country market town. Her father ran a small business which made furniture and haberdashery and provided a removals service. She describes her parent's marriage as a "very traditional" one and her mother (although a qualified physiotherapist) gave up work outside the home to look after Hilary and her brother. When her mother died Hilary took on the task of sorting out her belongings and she found something which made her reflect on her mother's role: "I found a letter... I've no idea why she kept it because she hadn't kept many letters... dated back from the early 1950's when my brother would have just started to go to boarding school... this letter from the hospital saying how much they regretted that she couldn't take up the part-time appointment but they fully understood her reasons..." Hilary points out that her mother never mentioned that she had turned down the chance of a return to the job she had loved in order to stay at home. Instead she conformed to Hilary's father's wishes and worked for him in a job she hated: "She would subvert it by filing everything sideways so my father never asked her to do that again!" Hilary describes her mother as "a very intelligent woman" but her father had a very traditional view of a woman's role: "My father's view of marriage was very much the male breadwinner, dependent housewife model." Hilary feels the inadequacies of this model really became apparent when her mother became ill in later life with MS: "... when my mother became ill and she could no longer be the very good housewife she was... my father was completely thrown by it and so was she... It's really a lousy model when it comes to care." She summarises the impact of her parent's marriage on her thus: "I suppose I had a very

early... living illustration of the male breadwinner [model] and male chauvinism and patriarchy if you like.”

Hilary passed her 11+ and went to her local grammar school. She remembers her father as taking very little interest in her education as he didn't feel it was important for girls. In contrast Hilary's mother negotiated with her headmaster so that Hilary could do science as well as Latin (an unusual combination for a girl at that time) to enable her to go to university. Hilary feels that: "... in spite of the sort of marriage contract as it were, she [her mother] really was very supportive." Hilary went to university to read maths, which she struggled with and feels was a bad choice for her. She then went to the LSE with the initial intention of becoming a social worker. Brian Abel-Smith was her tutor and the summer she finished the diploma he and Peter Townsend received a large grant for an extensive poverty survey. Hilary got one of the Research Assistantships and was responsible for a pilot study of large families. Hilary's academic interest widened to issues around children and the changing responsibilities and obligations of the state towards them. Whilst working on the poverty survey, Hilary read *The Disinherited Family* by Eleanor Rathbone which had a profound influence on her: "Eleanor Rathbone was an out-and-out feminist and showed me, quite apart from her excellent theoretical analysis of the wage system... that it wasn't just an issue about the relationship between the state and parents, but marriage was also an issue for women. So that got me thinking about the marriage relationship and of course that tied up with my own experience in terms of my father and my parents' marriage." After working on the poverty survey, Hilary did another Research Assistantship where she worked on a study of the history of social policy and tried to build on the work of Eleanor Rathbone to do a history of family allowances. By this time the main focus of her interest was: "... social security, the benefits system and marriage in terms of tax and legal stuff."

By the early 1970's, Hilary's research interests found focus in the newly emerging Women's Liberation Movement: "Suddenly my academic work around social security was politically interesting and relevant." Hilary joined the Women's Financial and Legal Independence Campaign in 1974 and she remembers one of their main areas of action was to try to get tax credits to go to the mother or main carer (usually the mother) so that women could have some degree of control over family finances. The campaign also focussed on issues like lone parent benefits and pensions and benefit rules to do with co-habitation. The campaign group was fairly small but many of its members have gone on to be prominent in politics or academia. They produced discussion kits that were widely used although Hilary feels that with secretarial support they could have done much more. The campaign evolved into the 'Why Be a Wife?' campaign in the late 1970's which was more widespread. "The 'Why Be a Wife?' campaign did ring a lot of bells in people's heads... If we'd had the money to fund it properly we could have got it a lot further." The campaign attracted a lot of interest and somewhat ironically the group were left some money by a woman who owned a stud farm in Dorset! When her father died Hilary found one of the 'Why Be a Wife?' leaflets amongst her father's things: "I don't think he knew I was associated with it, but I felt a bit sad in a way as he was clearly puzzled as to what did women want and what was marriage about now. It wasn't what he thought it was."

Hilary came to Bristol in 1979 to take up a Readership in Social Policy at Bristol University. She got involved with the WEA and helped to set up workshops on the

tax and benefit system and its impact on women. These workshops attracted a diverse selection of people: “We had a really nice woman who’d been part of the Spinsters’ Association in the 1930’s... we had women in their sixties and people in their early twenties who were concerned about cohabitation or unemployment benefit and a whole range of other things.” Hilary also became involved with teaching Women’s Studies extra-mural classes for the University of Bristol alongside a small group of women headed by Liz Bird, the co-ordinator of the extra mural department. She also helped to develop the Family and Social Policy course and the masters in Gender and Social Policy for Bristol University. Hilary recalls that there was some initial hostility to these courses being set up: “We got the most amazing letters from colleagues who would ask questions like ‘Is there a respectable literature in this field?’ and others who felt it looked like we were just giving masters to our friends...”

In terms of the factors and experiences that lead her to get involved with feminist activism, Hilary feels her family background was very important. She also cites her reading as having a considerable influence, particularly Eleanor Rathbone and Simone de Beauvoir but also “Doris Lessing’s book *The Golden Notebook* which came out in the mid sixties was important. Not least because the people I was working with at that time as a Research Assistant had been part of Doris Lessing’s circle and I actually did recognise some of the characters...” She was also influenced by the people she was working with, notably Abel-Smith and Townsend who held “... a very Fabian view... of the relationship between academics and policy makers. It was clear that you used research to change policies for what you hoped was the better. So I was always interested in the relationship between my research and changing policy, [it was] not just a theoretical interest which is probably why my stuff isn’t very theoretical, it’s pretty empirical descriptive stuff.”

As a Research Assistant Hilary spent a great deal of time writing to Ministers about benefits and policy matters, particularly those that affected women. She would also brief other academics on such matters before they went to see Ministers. With her involvement with the WLM however, came the chance to reach a greater variety of people: “I think having more open meetings and campaigning and having extra mural classes was very good because you did begin to reach a rather wider range of people. You weren’t just talking to the professionals as it were. Which I think is quite important.” She also became more involved with policy makers at the Department of Health and Social Security and was invited to join a government ‘think tank’, the Central Policy Review, which she describes thus: “... I had a sort of ringside seat at the inner workings of government... it was the most uncomfortable experience I’ve ever had but I learnt a huge amount. It confirmed some of my worst prejudices and some of my best ones in terms of the civil servants.” Hilary gives an example: “One of the most interesting committees I was on was looking at reforming the income tax system and on one occasion this senior civil servant from the treasury actually said ‘Speaking as a man and not as someone from the treasury...’ and then went on to defend the married man’s allowance and I thought you have just confirmed my view that men act on behalf of *men* as well as on behalf of their class or profession or whatever.” So Hilary found her political involvements educative and sometimes upsetting but it gave her a direct insight into how policies that shape women’s lives are formulated.

In terms of feminist campaigns as well as the financial and legal independence and 'Why Be a Wife?' campaigns, Hilary was also involved in ongoing campaigning about Child Benefit and Tax Credits: "the whole issue of Child Benefit has been pretty crucial in terms of making sure it remains paid to the woman, to the mother. It became an issue at the end of the 70's when Child Benefit replaced Family Allowances and Child Tax Allowances and then it became an issue in the mid 80's when it looked as if Family Income Support (Children's Element) was going to be paid to the father in order to try and convince him he was getting a family wage and then more recently when Gordon Brown has been wanting to make work pay and ... turning Family Credit into Working Families Tax Credit. ...It looked as if money for the children was going to be put in the wage packet which would mean in a two-earner family it would go into the man's wage packet as almost certainly he would be earning more..." Hilary is a member of the Women's Budget Group and she feels the work of this and other women's groups have helped to keep this issue on the agenda and contributed to some important policy changes. She also cites academic research (especially that of Ruth Lister) on this issue "... which shows what women know but you have to keep on saying. That if you want resources to reach the children you have to give it to the mother or at least the person who is looking after the children, who is likely to be the mother." Hilary has also been campaigning around the issue of women and pensions and about childcare, especially childcare for women returning to education. She is a member of the Elizabeth Nuffield educational fund, which gives grants to women to help them to get training or education in order to become independent. She has also done research on student childcare and as part of this studied the archives of the Elizabeth Nuffield trust which was: "...fascinating, it was forty years of application forms to the committee, looking at the women who were applying and how they'd changed, what they were wanting to do and why they wanted the money. It became clear about ten or fifteen years ago that help with childcare was becoming more and more urgent and so now we only give help for childcare at the moment because it's such a pressing need. So we are campaigning around that in terms of the gaps... there is a new childcare grant but it only goes to a minority of students because a lot of them can't find or can't use or don't want to use formal care and it's not enough anyway, they need completely free care."

On the general achievements of the 'second wave', Hilary feels that: "A whole lot has changed in relation to women's education. When I went to university... 1.5% of women in my cohort went to university. I think another 1.5% went into teacher training... half of my age cohort were married by the time they were 21. That is now very different. My 22 year old daughter has one school friend who is married and so she is the odd one out whereas when I was her age I was the odd one out because I went to university and I didn't have a fiancée and I didn't get married." Hilary also feels that: "In terms of the kinds of relationships that women can have that's much more fluid than it was in the sixties.... We think of the sixties as a very liberated period. It wasn't until right at the end actually that things began to loosen up... I think there are more choices [now] concerning the relationships you have which both makes it harder in some ways and a lot easier in others." She points out that although women are treated more as individuals in their own right in the benefits system, this is being subtly undermined by the present government: "...it's based on a joint assessment so we've only had independent taxation for ten years but as we go to a means tested benefits system which is based on the couple or the household as the unit of assessment we're undermining independent taxation at least for the poor and

for those at the bottom end of the income distribution. So we've won certain things in principle but lost them in practice." She points out that childcare provision is still woefully inadequate as she is particularly aware due to her involvement with the Elizabeth Nuffield Trust. Hilary also feels that: "Women have many opportunities but I still think they have to behave too much like men and I'm sad when one hears too many young women thinking... either because they feel they can't or because they're making a choice, and I wonder how constrained that choice is... that they have still got to choose between getting on with the work they like and having children... I certainly wasn't fighting for women to become like men but I think too many women feel they have got to work long hours and put their job before their family and then find it very hard to actually fit a family in around that, so we are nowhere near fitting employment around children and care and all the things it should be fitted around." Hilary points out that: "...equality between men and women has been put into practice in too many areas in a very restricted meaning of equality, meaning identical to, and I never believed that equal meant identical to, although that's what a lot of people choose to interpret it as meaning." Hilary feels that apart from the pressure to delay having children or not have them at all, other reproductive issues have been improved: "Clearly there isn't the same *real fear* of getting pregnant because contraception is readily available and abortion is much more [available]. When I was in my early twenties, unless you went to the family planning clutching your fiancée and with your engagement ring you couldn't get any help or advice. Abortion was still illegal so you were terrified of getting pregnant if you had a serious boyfriend. That fear has gone, on the other hand there is HIV and all that sort of ghastliness, which I think is very hard for young men and young women now..."

Hilary feels that the WLM managed to increase levels of awareness about certain issues e.g. domestic violence, which has meant that it is taken more seriously by governments and policy makers. Also childcare issues are being discussed openly and there is some attempt to get a national childcare strategy. She feels the WLM has been largely responsible for changing people's attitudes to this topic: "You don't [now] have the arguments in parliament [that] women should be at home looking after children themselves..." She does view this as an issue that the WLM managed to put on the agenda but where there is still work to be done. Hilary also feels the issue of pensions is one in which women are still facing discrimination: "...women are the poorest amongst pensioners. They are much more dependent on state pension provision than men. They are much less likely to have had the money to start saving early or contributing to a private pension or an occupational pension." Hilary also feels there are important issues around the provision of care: "The sort of privatisation of the welfare state that is going on... is really alarming. We are on the way to destroying our health and welfare services... the neo-liberal model of the welfare state is bad news for everybody, but I think it is particularly bad news for women because women are the majority of workers in the welfare state... and more dependent on those services and benefits than men... That's an issue which is far bigger than one dreamt of twenty years ago." Hilary also feels that: "... the demise of local government is very bad news, particularly for women because historically women have had an impact on social policy via local government. We have centralised so many decisions now that I think it's much harder for women to be engaged with [politics] if they have got kids and all sorts of other responsibilities." In terms of the general achievements of the 'second wave' Hilary feels that: "It's a very mixed picture really...one learns by reading history that these things emerge and then get

submerged again and then they come up in some other form... Sometimes the best you can do is to keep something on an agenda at the very least. Just keep it there in people's minds so that we don't forget. When things are better you can create and find the opportunity to bring these things back in again." For Hilary then, the important issues must be continually re-assessed and if necessary re-discovered in order to keep up the momentum of change.

INTERVIEWED BY ILONA SINGER

ANNIE OLIVER

Annie currently lives and works in Bristol; her main areas of activism are working and campaigning for Single Parent Action Network (SPAN). She was involved in the One Parent Group and played a major part in the 'Don't Cut Lone Parent Benefits' campaign.

Annie was born in Whitby, a small fishing town in North Yorkshire and grew up in the neighbouring county, County Durham. Her parents were married very young; her mother was 16 and her father was 18 or 19. Annie was born shortly after the marriage. Her parents were from very different backgrounds: her father was working class and her mother was middle class. Annie found growing up in a mixed class family made her very conscious of class issues and found this very confusing. She felt she had different rules and had to behave differently with different people. This made her very insecure and she wasn't quite sure of her place when she was growing up.

Annie's parents separated when she was 8 years old and she believes that this benefitted her and her family and that her mother had good reasons to become a single parent.

Annie became aware of discrimination from an early age, as single parent families were not the norm where she grew up. Annie's mother had left education to become a wife and a mother and in the 1970's there weren't a lot of child care facilities, so she needed to work full time to earn enough money to support her family. She worked as a Class1, long-distance lorry driver. Annie says this was a difficult time for her: "we lost my dad, my brother and I, and then I think we lost my mum to work. We didn't see a lot of her, we were looked after quite a lot and for a long time I struggled to come to terms with a lot of these issues, but actually I think she was just doing what she had to do"

Annie, her brother and mother lived in a caravan for about three years as her mother couldn't afford a house. She experienced a lot of negativity from people around her at the time: they were called gypsies, the school children would mock her on the school bus and women would keep their husbands away from her mother believing she would steal them away.

Annie left home at 16. Her family had expected her to go to College and University, instead she went on to do a Youth Training Scheme, which upset her family. Annie felt she needed to go out and earn her own money and has been working ever since.

Annie believes she didn't ever make a conscious decision to get involved in feminist campaigns. She was brought up in an environment where gender stereotypes were not an issue. Her grandmother was a rally driver who was the first woman to win the Lindisfarne Rally in the North East of England. All the women in Annie's family drove motorcars and undertook typically 'male' roles. She explains "I didn't grow up thinking I am in this family with these incredibly strong women; I just didn't actually question it. I suppose other people found it odd that my mother was a lorry driver, but we didn't".

In 1990, after the break-up of a relationship, Annie decided to move to Bristol. She was pregnant with her son at the time. Annie decided that she wanted to keep the baby but didn't want to stay with the father and strongly believed that she could offer the baby a more emotionally secure and stable lifestyle without his father. So she left London where she had lived with her former partner and came to Bristol.

Shortly after moving to Bristol, she became involved in a project that supported single parents. She initially became involved as a means of support and didn't contemplate campaigning. However, the more she became involved with single parent issues the more she began to question things, and found herself experiencing similar discrimination about being a single parent as her mother had experienced. Annie became very politically aware at this point.

Annie found that she had gone from being somebody who had always worked – she had been a PA/Secretary with a very good salary and had been treated with a lot of respect – to someone who was only identified by her National Insurance Number. Annie became conscious that she was being treated very differently by society now. She began to question why anybody had the right to speak to her in that way, or to judge her or to think she would be less of a parent because she was a single parent, or she was less of a person because she was having a mixed race child, or claiming benefits. She had always worked and had paid tax and now when she needed the safety blanket of the Welfare State she felt entitled to use it.

In 1990 Annie became involved with Single Parent Action Network (SPAN), which grew out of the One Parent Project. Annie joined SPAN just as it began, as a volunteer. SPAN needed someone like her who had secretarial, administration and computer skills. As Annie was becoming more and more politically aware, she felt duty bound to respond to some of the negative things that were being said about single parents, so whenever she had the chance, she volunteered to speak out against the negativity.

Annie volunteered to take part in a special 20-minute feature, which 'Newsnight' ran about single parents, and the poverty they face. Camera crews lived in Annie's house for 3 days and filmed her every move. They followed her to the park, they showed her reading with her son, they followed her to the One Parent Project and to SPAN and showed that she was in training and that she was doing voluntary work. However, Annie found that she experienced a lot of hostility from the very people she was working and volunteering alongside. Although Annie was very poor at the time, she always made sure her son was fed and clothed properly, even if that meant going without herself. This was seen differently by some single parents. They saw Annie living in a nice house, with nice clothes for her son and a bedroom with new bedclothes on the bed and books and toys, and didn't believe she was a poor and struggling single parent just like them. "This is what made me get involved with anti-poverty work. This was helping to set up the UK Coalition to Eradicate Poverty (a UN initiative) and working alongside Oxfam and others and speaking out about poverty amongst single parents".

In the early 1990's SPAN began to grow as a UK network and started to be taken more seriously as an organization by the government and the media, and at this time Annie became more involved in SPAN's advisory group.

In 1997, when New Labour came to Parliament, Annie became involved with the 'Don't Cut Lone Parent Benefits' Campaign. Annie Marjoram, who worked closely with Ken Livingstone in London at the time, saw Annie on the television saying that this initiative [to cut lone parent benefit] was "absolutely appalling". She contacted SPAN and became involved in the campaign herself. With Annie Marjoram's involvement the campaigners gained access to the Houses of Parliament on the day the vote was taking place.

On the day of the vote, a coach full of single parents from Bristol arrived at the Houses of Parliament to protest against these cuts. Annie explains, "We were all over the newspapers. Our kids sat down in the Houses of Parliament with their lunchboxes and their crayons and their colouring books and people like Lord Archer had to step over them, and they'd not seen so many women I don't think, they'd certainly not seen women with buggies and children and lunchboxes and all the things that come with kids and they were clearly quite shocked by us". Unfortunately, despite their efforts the vote still went through.

Annie also explains: "You can imagine the gamut of emotions for us because the cuts went ahead and we were distraught because those women in the country had been made poorer and we knew that this would necessarily affect their children. See the thing is we are caught in a 'Catch 22' situation because if we say we can't feed our children then it's almost like admitting to some kind of neglect or abuse. What women, single parents all women will do when they are extremely poor is feed their children, so nobody is ever going to say I am so poor I can not feed my children. We know this, but what we also know is that these women are not going to eat properly, they'll buy their kids a winter coat but not themselves, that they will be cold, depressed and hungry and that they will get ill and this will have major implications for the rest of their lives".

"However we really, really made our presence felt. We were in every newspaper we were on all the radio programmes, on TV. I think that was one of the achievements that was very sort of 'out there'. Other than that a lot of our achievements have been quite subtle, we've plodded along, we've got money from Europe to do our work, and we have respect around Europe as an anti-discriminatory, grass-roots network. We are respected by people, we've had the support of some wonderful, wonderful people along the way –members of parliament who really do have ethics (and there's not many of them), and researchers and professors, and we've written some wonderful publications. We've maintained a grassroots multicultural way of working even though we are growing as an organization. We've felt that we've given single parents a voice and right back at the beginning in 1990, when I got pregnant, that has always been the most important thing for me. The achievements are not perhaps things you could see, some of the achievements are so subtle that they might just make me smile quietly, they might not mean a lot to the outside world."

Annie continues to work and campaign for SPAN in Bristol and feels happy to be part of a group which has given single parents a voice since its birth in 1990 and continues to do so to this day.

Annie's closing comments:

“I think there are a lot of women around the place doing a lot of work with very limited resources, who perhaps don't – because of their background, because of their education, or because of the stereotypes that surround the word ‘feminism’ – the ‘F’ word and that – don't consider themselves feminist – perhaps like my mum never will. But I think what I would like to see is a way of recognizing the work that those women do – the ones that never get awards, that don't get a name for themselves, because they don't go into councillors' meetings or they just quietly work away and (I don't know) perhaps feminism is just women's work. What I would be very keen to see is breaking down the barriers around it, I suppose I feel it's middle-class jargon, I'm not sure some middle-class people might think it's working class jargon, it's just any kind of jargon. I'd like to see different ways and different words to perhaps be more inclusive around recognizing what women do. I think that's really important, because if I was to say to some of my friends that I've been interviewed around this feminism thing, they probably would imagine, (and I know it's a negative stereotype) a bunch of women who wear dungarees and Doctor Martens and all that kind of stuff. I really think it is important that we break down those types of stereotypes and try to be more inclusive about what it really means.”

Interviewed by Romy Williams

MARILYN PORTER



Marilyn Porter is currently Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She is still involved with feminist activism especially in relation to political and economic issues, locally, nationally and internationally. She is currently involved with the Feminist Knowledge Network, the St. John's Women's Centre (in Newfoundland) and feminist work around the UN (Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice). During the 'second wave' period in the 1970s Marilyn was involved with the Bristol Women's Centre, teaching on women's studies extra mural and WEA courses, in the *Half the Sky* collection, and in numerous projects and campaigns. She wrote one of the first Ph.D. theses to come out of the feminism of the 1970s (completed at Bristol University in 1979). Later she was involved in Greenham demonstrations and in supporting women's workers' struggles in the Northwest. After she moved to Canada in 1980, she became involved in developing the new women's studies programme at Memorial University, as well as in the Women's Centre and all its many political and activist projects. Nationally, she served as President of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, and was on various committees within the New Democratic Party and around the Constitutional debates of the 1980s. Most recently she edited *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* for seven years, until 2002. For the last 12 years, she has worked on women's development projects in SouthEast Asia, with particularly strong links to Indonesian feminists and has contributed substantially to the new Women's Studies programmes developing there.

Marilyn describes her background as 'stultifyingly middle class'. She grew up in a remote part of North Wales and was sent to a girl's boarding school which she hated and describes as: "... terminally awful, I hated every second. It really didn't teach me anything." In terms of her early background Marilyn feels there was very little to predispose her towards the Women's Liberation Movement apart from the influence of her mother. Marilyn describes her mother as being 'feisty' and 'independent' and having been denied an education herself she was keen that her daughters should study A levels and 'get a profession', which they all did, although Marilyn was the only one to go to University.

By the time Marilyn got to university (Trinity College, Dublin 1961-5) she was hungry for a broader education in terms of political involvements: "I was searching all the time. I'd had no exposure to socialism at all, no exposure to Marxism, no exposure to anything really. God it was appalling!" At university she became involved with left politics and CND. After university Marilyn took a Diploma in Education, got married, had her daughter Fenella and went with her husband to Botswana to teach in a progressive school. She describes the experience thus: "... it was formative, I began learning a whole lot there about socialist principles in practice. But like many of these 'lefty' places it was a school that was incredibly oppressive towards women, especially women who had babies." Marilyn started to: "become increasingly aware that I was defined as a mother and therefore I wasn't allowed to take part in any of the more interesting activities in the world." She began to realise she was not alone in this feeling: "I think it was part of a generational thing. I think all of us got pissed off around that time." Marilyn remembers reading in the Guardian about the historic women's liberation conference at Ruskin college, Oxford (1970) and was very excited about it and decided to get involved in the Women's Liberation Movement as soon as she got back to England. When she and her husband returned to England they went to live in Bristol. By this time Marilyn was pregnant with her second child, Luke. Marilyn wasn't sure where to find women's liberation activities in Bristol so she joined an organisation called the 'National Housewives Register' which was not explicitly feminist in its aims. However one evening Jan Parham and Janet Brewer came along to talk about the new Women's Liberation Movement starting up in Bristol and Marilyn was extremely enthusiastic: "I just fell into their arms and thought this is amazing. That was it, the rest of my life was then tied up with the women's movement."

Marilyn recalls that she started going to the early meetings of the Bristol Women's Liberation Movement in Ellen Malos' house and became involved in virtually every campaign and activity that was going on, including setting up the Bristol Women's Centre. She remembers helping to set up some of the first women's refuges and attending lots of meetings and conferences, including the national WLM conference held in Bristol (she was in charge of arranging billets). She was also involved at national level and joined many groups and campaigns, identifying more and most closely with the Socialist currents that were developing. She regards this time as a 'fantastic learning experience' for her and has a recollection of Ellen Malos and Betty Underwood driving her round the north circular after a conference and explaining recondite details about State Monopoly Capitalism, Socialism in One Country and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Ellen, Betty and others were influential in developing both the ideas and the practices of the non-aligned left feminists in Bristol, and socialist feminists in Bristol took part in various struggles around gaining equality for working women. Marilyn also stresses the amazing creativity of the time and remembers Monica Sjo's powerful feminist paintings and Pat Van Twest and Jacky Thrupp "doing wonderful, disruptive things". For example, Marilyn was on the registration desk at the Acton women's liberation conference when Pat and Jacky turned up in drag: "Everybody freaked out, it was immensely exciting."

Marilyn stayed on in Bristol and did a PhD. She met up with Liz Bird who was the co-ordinator of extra mural courses for Bristol University and also a committed feminist. Marilyn got involved with teaching on women's studies extra mural courses in and around the Bristol area for the university and also for the WEA. As an

outgrowth of these courses Marilyn joined a group of women academics and activists who produced an early women's studies reader called *Half the Sky* (1979). Marilyn remembers lots of disputes and infighting among all the feminist groupings in Bristol at the time but feels that: "I have to say, I just thought they were terribly exciting. We had wonderful fights, almost fisticuffs over Wages for Housework. That was a classic struggle, it was so intense and we really cared about whether we sorted it out or not." She feels that an article that Caroline New (then Freeman) wrote around this time to address the wages for housework issue was very important: "*When is a Wage Not a Wage...* was short but brilliant. I think that's the moment when I thought that getting intellectually on top of this stuff, really working it out and then turning it into political action is where I want to be."

After her PhD finished Marilyn got a job teaching sociology at Manchester University where she met other important feminist academics (Alison Kelly and Liz Stanley, with whom she is still in close touch) and was able to really refine her ideas about feminism. When Margaret Thatcher became prime minister the non-aligned left feminists "felt they had to get tougher" and lots of them, including Marilyn, joined the Communist Party. Marilyn moved to Lancaster whilst she was working in Manchester and got involved with the women's movement there. Whilst in Lancaster she remembers playing the tambourine in a feminist band! She also became involved with Greenham women's peace camp and took part in many actions at the camp. As part of her involvement with Greenham, she also helped to organise courses on non-violent direct action. Then in 1980 she lost her job in Manchester, got a one-year contract in Canada, returned to Manchester (still living in Lancaster) for two years and finally got a job in Sociology at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Marilyn found Canada and especially Newfoundland posed whole new challenges to understand and address. For her first 10 years in Newfoundland, her research focussed on women in Newfoundland, especially the economic situation of women in fishing communities. More recently she has moved on to issues about women and development and for the last 12 years she has been working with groups of women in Indonesia and has been helping to get women's studies programmes and research established there. Marilyn points out that Canada has a continuity of feminist activity which is tied in with political activity: "right now in Newfoundland we're fighting the closure of the fishery and we have...a support group for women in the fishery who have either been displaced or are trying to keep their communities going after the collapse of the fishery." She is also the Coordinator of the Feminist Knowledge Network, which she describes as: "an international coalition of women's studies journals both grassroots and academic", which she feels is an important link between activist work and theoretical work. For Marilyn both are vitally important: "... you can't really be a feminist academic in Canada without having decent grassroots, community based credentials. You can't just do it in the abstract."

Marilyn sits on the board of the local women's centre in St. John's, Newfoundland, (which is the longest continuously running women's centre in Canada, recently celebrating its 30th anniversary), and also works closely with the Provincial Advisory Council for Women and the Women's Policy Office. Marilyn is fascinated by the differences in the profile of the Women's Liberation Movement in different countries. She points out that Canada had a Royal Commission on the Status of Women, that reported in 1970, and many of the 167 recommendations were actually implemented,

providing Canadian women with effective ways of putting pressure on governments at all levels. There is also a National Action Committee, which is a federation of 600 or so women's groups acting as a co-ordinating structure for the network of thriving women's groups. In comparison, Britain has very few women's centres and even the once vibrant one in Bristol is now defunct. At the dinner held as part of the celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the St. John's Women's Centre Marilyn was seated next to one of her graduate students who said: "... the thing that really strikes me is how much fun you all had then [i.e. the 'second wave' period]". Although Marilyn would agree with this she also points out that: "We had these appalling fights because there was only one movement to be in at that time, and it was the same in England. But in England we kind of fractured horribly and everybody went off in different directions. When we were all in one place we had these appalling fights but we were moving forwards..." By the time Marilyn settled in St. John's the women's movement in the UK had split into different strands and there were no longer national conferences. One of the most exciting things for Marilyn when she arrived in Newfoundland was that the women's movement there was all still together – at least partly because, with a smaller population basis, "we couldn't afford the luxury of the factionalism that had developed in England ... in St. John's there was a women's centre that was supposed to encompass us all, so obviously the fights were pretty intense - about how far lesbians were being discriminated against, about class issues and about theoretical issues..." However Marilyn is keen to stress that much of the conflict was productive in helping to refine ideas and develop new campaigning strategies and groups, and it is no small achievement that the women's movement in Newfoundland still has a unity that has long gone in England, and even in parts of Canada.

When asked about why she became a feminist, Marilyn replied: "I think it was frustration that got me there and having got there I never left it." In terms of her own self-development, Marilyn feels that the women's movement has played a key role. She recalls that: "At that time I was really shy and not prepared to talk in public at all and we had a system where we would accept invitations to go out and talk to groups... with a beginner and somebody a bit more experienced and then if you were a beginner you could start off just by sitting on the platform and then gradually you'd start to answer questions..." Although she is generally very positive about her involvement with the WLM, she points out that the ideological changes that women underwent could cause them some difficulties: "I think it did cause problems in our own lives because we were pushing all of the envelopes and some of those envelopes were a little bit resistant, to put it mildly, but we changed the course of our lives and I very much doubt if anybody went on the same way as they were before."

In terms of the achievements of the time, Marilyn feels that: "In Bristol itself we made huge progress in terms of raising awareness and having campaigns and enlisting a whole lot of people at various levels and nationally we had significant achievements in terms of beating back attacks on abortion legislation and in terms of nursery availability... and the other key demands of the period." Marilyn does believe that more work is needed and her general reflections on the period are that: "I suppose it's two steps forward one back or if you're feeling pessimistic, one step forward and two steps back, but certainly a lot of people have said it was a very formative period for them and that is definitely true for me. I worked extremely hard and put a lot of energy into it but I think I was the net gainer and I look back on that period as being

tremendously exciting, lots of new ideas around the place and above all, fun. I can't believe that we had such fun... even when we were tearing each other's eyes out and crying on each other's shoulders. It was very intense." Marilyn points out that she still has many friends that she met through the WLM and she has "... a feminist daughter and I'm working on having a feminist granddaughter!" (Her granddaughter is currently three years old). She feels that even though feminism is fairly low profile currently, at least in England: "... those ideas are still there to be reclaimed but a lot depends on whether our generation can connect with the generations coming up behind them... I think the thing that bothers me most about the British situation is that I'm not sure if the connections between the feminist generations are strong. We have fights in Canada where younger feminists say 'get off our backs there's too many of you around' which is a ... fine disagreement to be having...cross fertilisation between the generations is vital."

Marilyn found the whole process of being interviewed both productive and 'weird' – to re-visit a long gone period, to remember the energy of the time, to reflect on the different routes the women's movement has taken on both sides of the Atlantic, and to stop for a moment and consider her own trajectory as she has lived her life as a feminist – so valuable to do that. Her students are constantly reminding her that she is an 'historic relic' and how important it is to remember our history!

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

PAT ROBERTS



PAT ROBERTS IS CURRENTLY THE LABOUR COUNCILLOR FOR AVONMOUTH. HER MAIN FEMINIST INVOLVEMENTS HAVE BEEN: NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN, BRISTOL WOMEN'S CENTRE, CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING GROUPS, BRISTOL WOMEN'S LIBERATION GROUP, RECLAIM THE NIGHT DEMONSTRATIONS, GREENHAM COMMON, AND THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OF BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL.

PAT WAS BORN IN LIVERPOOL IN 1938. SHE GREW UP IN BOOTLE WHERE HER MOTHER WAS A NURSE AND HER FATHER WORKED ON THE DOCKS. AS HER FATHER OFTEN WORKED AWAY FROM HOME, PAT REMEMBERS MANY EVENINGS SPENT JUST WITH HER MOTHER LISTENING TO WAR NEWS AND UNPICKING WOOLLEN JUMPERS TO MAKE NEW ONES. PAT'S MOTHER TALKED TO HER AS THOUGH SHE WAS AN ADULT, SHARING PROBLEMS AND SEEKING ADVICE. AS A RESULT PAT MATURED FAST AND THOUGHT ABOUT THINGS

LOGICALLY FROM AN EARLY AGE. PAT WENT TO SCHOOL AT THREE AND A HALF AND HER MOTHER RAN A NURSERY WHICH WAS NEXT DOOR TO HER SCHOOL. PAT FREQUENTLY 'ESCAPED' TO SPEND TIME WITH HER MOTHER AT THE NURSERY. IN TERMS OF THE FACTORS IN HER EARLY BACKGROUND THAT KINDLED AN INTEREST IN FEMINISM, PAT CITES THE INFLUENCE OF HER MOTHER: "MY MOTHER WAS A VERY STRONG-MINDED WOMAN. SHE WAS A TORY, GOD HELP US.... BUT SHE WAS A VERY STRONG-MINDED WOMAN AND SHE ALWAYS HAD THIS BIG THING THAT ME AND MY SISTER MUST BE INDEPENDENT OF MEN. WE MUST NEVER *EVER* BE FINANCIALLY DEPENDENT ON MEN... SO WE HAD TO HAVE PROPER PROFESSIONS AND SHE WAS VERY CLEAR ABOUT THAT. SHE WOULD NEVER HAVE CALLED HERSELF A FEMINIST IN A MILLION YEARS BUT SHE WAS VERY KEEN ON INDEPENDENCE AND EQUALITY."

BY THE LATE SIXTIES PAT HAD BECOME A SOCIAL WORKER AND INITIALLY DIDN'T FEEL THAT FEMINISM WAS FOR HER: "... I WAS A PROFESSIONAL WOMAN EARNING A DECENT SALARY, [HAD] MY OWN CAR WHICH WAS NOT THAT COMMON IN THE LATE SIXTIES, DID ALL THE THINGS I WANTED TO DO". AFTER PAT GOT MARRIED SHE BECAME MORE DIRECTLY AWARE OF THE

RELEVANCE OF FEMINISM: "I GOT A LETTER FROM WHAT WAS THEN NATIONAL INSURANCE ...SAYING COULD I SEND THEM MY MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE AS MY STATUS AS AN INSURED WOMAN HAD CHANGED. I WENT UP LIKE A BLOODY ROCKET. I WAS SO ANGRY BECAUSE I PAID MY OWN INSURANCE. I PAID MY TAX AND AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED THE FACT THAT I'D GOT MARRIED HAD GOT BUGGER ALL TO DO WITH ANYONE ELSE AND I FLATLY REFUSED TO DO IT. SO I GOT A STRING OF LETTERS FROM THEM THREATENING ME WITH ALL SORTS BECAUSE I WOULDN'T GIVE THEM MY MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE, IT STILL LEAVES ME SPEECHLESS." EVENTUALLY THE LETTERS STOPPED AND PAT FOUND OUT THAT A FRIEND WHO HAD BEEN AT HER WEDDING HAD EXERTED SOME INFLUENCE AND SAID THAT THEY'D WITNESSED HER MARRIAGE. PAT WAS ANGRY AS SHE WANTED TO HAVE A CHANCE TO HIGHLIGHT HOW DISCRIMINATORY THE SITUATION WAS: "I WAS SO ANGRY BECAUSE I WAS DETERMINED THEY'D TAKE ME TO COURT BEFORE I'D LET THEM HAVE IT. I KNOW IT SOUNDS TRIVIAL BUT THEY WERE TELLING ME I WAS A CHATTEL AND NOBODY TELLS ME THAT!"

AFTER EXPERIENCING DIRECT DISCRIMINATION DUE TO BEING A MARRIED WOMAN, PAT BECAME INTERESTED IN ARTICLES ABOUT FEMINISM. WHEN PAT AND HER HUSBAND MOVED TO BLACKBURN IN 1972 SHE BECAME INVOLVED IN A LOCAL WOMEN'S GROUP. ONE OF THE FIRST ISSUES THE GROUP BECAME INVOLVED IN WAS REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND THEY ORGANISED REGULAR PREGNANCY TESTING SESSIONS. THEY ALSO CAMPAIGNED AGAINST ANTI-ABORTION LEGISLATION. PAT DESCRIBES THIS INVOLVEMENT IN THIS: "... IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D EVER TAKEN TO THE STREETS IN MY LIFE... WE MARCHED, WE PICKETED, WE HAD PLACARDS, WE STOOD IN SHOPPING CENTRES HANDING OUT LEAFLETS, WE GOT PETITIONS, WE WENT TO LONDON... WE DID ALL SORTS REALLY." PAT AND HER HUSBAND MOVED TO BRISTOL IN 1976 AND SHE BECAME INVOLVED WITH THE BRISTOL WOMEN'S CENTRE WHICH WAS JUST STARTING UP. SHE ALSO BECAME INVOLVED IN CAMPAIGNS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE BRISTOL AREA THROUGH THE BRISTOL WOMEN'S LIBERATION GROUP AND A CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING GROUP. "I REMEMBER PAM TREVITHICK, SHE WAS THE PERSON WHO LEAD THE [CR] GROUP AND SHE USED THE PHRASE 'THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL'... IT STRUCK ME VERY MUCH THAT THAT WAS TRUE, THAT OUR EXPERIENCES OF THE WORLD WERE WHAT SHOULD BE COLOURING OUR POLITICS." PAT GOT MORE INVOLVED WITH WOMEN'S CAMPAIGNS PARTICULARLY AROUND ABORTION RIGHTS AND SHE HAS SOME COLOURFUL MEMORIES OF THIS TIME: "I WAS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS PUBLIC GALLERY IN THE LATE 1970'S... WHEN THERE WAS ANOTHER ANTI-ABORTION BILL... THERE WERE TWO WOMEN IN THE FRONT ROW...I KNEW THEM BY SIGHT EXTREMELY WELL AND THEY WERE LESBIAN WOMEN AND THEY WERE WEARING DRESSES! NOW THE UNIFORM IN THOSE DAYS WAS DUNGAREES WITH BIG BUCKLES AND I KEPT LOOKING AT THESE TWO WOMEN AND THINKING HOW COULD I BE SEEING THEM IN DRESSES... AND HALF WAY THROUGH THE DEBATE THEY STOOD UP, UNWOUND THESE DRESSES [WHICH WERE ACTUALLY BANNERS!] AND HUNG THEM OVER THE BALCONY. IT CAUSED UPROAR... THESE MEN APPEARED AND ARRESTED THEM AND CARTED THEM AWAY. WE DISCOVERED THEY'D PUT THEM IN A PRISON CELL IN THE BASEMENT. THE WHOLE BLOODY PLACE ERUPTED... THE WHOLE LOT OF US DEMANDED THAT THEY RELEASE THEM WHICH THEY DID EVENTUALLY." PAT ALSO REMEMBERS GOING ON 'RECLAIM THE NIGHT' MARCHES, PARTICULARLY ONE DOWN FLEET ST. WHICH ATTRACTED A HEAVY POLICE PRESENCE. "WE DISCOVERED ROUND THE CORNER THERE WERE ENDLESS POLICE VANS AND HORSES... WHAT DID THEY THINK WE WERE GONNA DO? ALL RIGHT WE SHUT FLEET STREET, SO WHAT?!"

PAT ALSO WENT TO GREENHAM COMMON REGULARLY WITH SOME OF HER COLLEAGUES FROM THE HOSPITAL IN BRISTOL THAT SHE WORKED FOR: "WE REGULARLY WENT ON A MARCH IN LONDON TO DO WITH GREENHAM COMMON. THE WHOLE LOT OF US WENT ONE SATURDAY AND LOTS OF WOMEN GOT ARRESTED AND WE WERE TERRIFIED WE'D GET ARRESTED BECAUSE IT SUDDENLY DAWNED ON US THAT WE'D GOT A WARD ROUND MONDAY MORNING AND IN OUR GROUP WERE THE WARD SOCIAL WORKER, THE WARD SISTER, THE WARD DOCTOR AND THE WARD PHYSIOTHERAPIST AND IF THEY'D ARRESTED US LOT THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN SERIOUS PROBLEMS!"

PAT BECAME INVOLVED IN THE FIRST WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OF BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL. SHE RECALLS THAT THERE WERE MANY BIG ARGUMENTS WITHIN THE COMMITTEE AND THERE WAS: "... A BIG SPLIT IN IT AND ALL SORTS OF VICIOUSNESS WENT ON. WHEN WOMEN FALL OUT, THEY FALL OUT BIG TIME." OVER TIME PAT'S INVOLVEMENTS HAVE BECOME MORE 'BROADLY BASED' AND NOT AS SPECIFICALLY ABOUT WOMEN. FOR EXAMPLE, SHE WAS VERY INVOLVED IN SUPPORTING THE STRIKING MINERS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN THE 1980'S. SHE IS ALSO INVOLVED IN THE LABOUR PARTY AND HER TRADE UNION AND REMEMBERS THE FIRST TIME SHE SPOKE AT A UNION MEETING TO TRY TO GET HER BRANCH TO OPPOSE THE JAMES WHITE (ANTI-ABORTION) BILL. SHE WAS ENCOURAGED BY OTHER LABOUR PARTY MEMBERS TO STAND FOR COUNCIL BUT PAT IS AWARE THAT: "IT'S NOT VERY EASY TO GET YOURSELF SELECTED IF YOU ARE A WOMAN, EVEN NOW." SHE WAS SELECTED IN 1988 AND WON HER FIRST ELECTION AND BECAME COUNCILLOR FOR KNOWLE IN BRISTOL FROM 1988-98. IN 1998 SHE BECAME COUNCILLOR FOR AVONMOUTH, THE POST SHE STILL HOLDS. PAT FEELS THAT SHE HAS BECOME: "... INVOLVED IN WOMEN'S ISSUES POLITICALLY, RATHER THAN AS PART OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT". FOR INSTANCE AS VICE-CHAIR OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE OF THE COUNCIL SHE HAS SOME SAY ON WHETHER ANY NEW SEX SHOPS CAN BE ESTABLISHED IN BRISTOL. "LATER THIS MONTH WE'VE GOT THREE APPLICATIONS FOR SEX SHOPS AND WERE GONNA HAVE TO GO ROUND AND HAVE A LOOK AT ALL OF THEM. ONE OF THEM IS A GAY MEN'S SEX SHOP... MY BASIC PREMISE WOULD BE THAT SEX SHOPS ARE THERE TO OPPRESS WOMEN AND MY NORMAL RESPONSE WOULD BE TO TELL THEM TO BUGGER OFF BUT IT'S A BIT DIFFICULT WHEN IT'S A GAY MEN'S SEX SHOP!" PAT HAS ALSO BEEN INVOLVED IN HAVING COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES PUT UP AROUND BRISTOL TO CELEBRATE THE LIVES OF IMPORTANT BRISTOL WOMEN.

IN TERMS OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PERIOD, PAT FEELS THAT: "... WE VERY MUCH RAISED THE PROFILE OF THE FACT THAT WOMEN WERE PERSONS IN OUR OWN RIGHT AND NOT TO BE CONSIDERED EITHER SOMEBODY'S DAUGHTER OR SOMEBODY'S WIFE. I PERSONALLY HAVE NEVER WORN A WEDDING RING, [ALTHOUGH] MY HUSBAND DOES." SHE FEELS THAT THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT RAISED THE ISSUE OF THE RIGHT TO DECENT CHILDCARE, ALTHOUGH THE ORIGINAL DEMAND FOR 24-HOUR CHILDCARE IS STILL UNMET. SHE ALSO FEELS THAT: "THE ABORTION ISSUE CHANGED THE POLITICAL COLOUR OF THE COUNTRY BECAUSE CONSISTENTLY EVER SINCE, ALL ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE DAVID STEELE'S 1968 ACT HAVE BEEN RESISTED... OPINION POLLS CONSISTENTLY OPPOSE ANY REPEAL TO THAT ACT." ALTHOUGH PAT BELIEVES THIS IS NOT ENOUGH: "IN MY VIEW YOU SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO ABORTION AS OF RIGHT, WITHOUT ANY QUESTION AT LEAST UNTIL TWELVE WEEKS, NO MESSING. BUT REALLY NOWHERE'S GOT THAT HAS IT?" SHE STILL FEELS PROUD THAT SHE WAS

INVOLVED WITH THIS CAMPAIGN. SHE ALSO FEELS THAT THE GREATER DEGREE OF ACCEPTANCE AND KNOWLEDGE OF LESBIAN AND GAY ISSUES OWES A DEBT TO THE WLM: "I THINK WE WERE PROBABLY RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH MORE OPENNESS ABOUT THE LESBIAN AND GAY AGENDA BECAUSE THERE WERE SO MANY LESBIAN WOMEN IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT SO THAT PROFILE WAS RAISED. AN AWFUL LOT OF WOMEN BEFORE THEY JOINED THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAD NEVER MET A LESBIAN WOMAN. I HADN'T... AT LEAST NOT KNOWINGLY. SO IT RAISED THAT PROFILE AND I THINK IT MADE HETEROSEXUAL WOMEN MORE COMFORTABLE AROUND LESBIAN WOMEN AND I FOUND HAVING GOT MY HEAD ROUND IT AND GOT USED TO THE IDEA I NEVER GAVE IT A SECOND THOUGHT."

IN TERMS OF THE AREAS WHERE THERE IS STILL MORE WORK TO BE DONE, PAT FEELS THAT: "WE'VE NOWHERE NEAR SOLVED THE ISSUES AROUND WOMEN'S PAY AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN EMPLOYMENT AND I DOUBT

WE EVER WILL SO LONG AS WE'RE THE ONES WHO BEAR CHILDREN, BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT THAT ONE ROUND YOUR NECK FOREVER REALLY HAVEN'T YOU? SO I DON'T THINK WE'VE SOLVED THAT." SHE ALSO POINTS OUT THAT AS A GROUP, WOMEN STILL LACK POLITICAL POWER: "I DON'T THINK WE'VE GOT ANYWHERE NEAR THE SORT OF UTOPIA I'D LIKE TO SEE WHERE MOST OF THE MAJOR RULERS AND LEADERS OF MAJOR GOVERNMENTS ARE WOMEN. THE ONE WOMAN PRIME MINISTER WE'VE HAD WAS A DISASTER. JUST IMAGINE IF IT WASN'T GEORGE BUSH IT WAS A WOMAN. DO YOU REALLY THINK WE'D BE BOMBING THE CRAP OUT OF PEOPLE? NO WE WOULDN'T." PAT IS ALSO DUBIOUS ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OF SOME YOUNG WOMEN NOW AND HOPES THAT THIS ISN'T AN INDIRECT LEGACY OF FEMINISM: "I HOPE WE DIDN'T LEAD THE WAY TO WHAT YOU SEE IN THIS CITY LATE AT NIGHT. VERY AGGRESSIVE DRUNKEN WOMEN TRYING TO BEHAVE LIKE BOYS. I REALLY HOPE WE DIDN'T LEAD TO THAT BECAUSE WE CERTAINLY NEVER MEANT TO." PAT BELIEVES THAT ALTHOUGH THE WLM GOT MANY ISSUES ON THE AGENDA AND CERTAIN FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION OUTLAWED, THERE IS STILL WORK TO BE DONE: "THE ANSWER IS POLITICAL CONTROL. WE CAN RAISE PROFILES BUT UNTIL YOU'VE GOT A) THE POLITICAL CONTROL AND B) THE MONEY... YOU CAN TALK YOUR HEAD OFF BUT YOU CAN'T ACHIEVE ANY REALLY SOLID GOALS AND THAT'S WHAT WE'VE GOT TO GO FOR." SHE FEELS THAT WOMEN'S PROFILE AND INVOLVEMENT IN CERTAIN TYPES OF PROFESSIONS STILL NEEDS TO INCREASE, ALTHOUGH THIS IS HAPPENING SLOWLY: "YOU'RE NOT SURPRISED NOW WHEN YOU MEET A WOMAN SCIENTIST ARE YOU? THE HEAD OF THE SCIENCE SECTION AT @BRISTOL WHICH IS A MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTION... SHE WAS A WOMAN AND THAT DIDN'T SEEM IN THE LEAST UNUSUAL." SHE FEELS THAT WOMEN'S VISIBILITY IN CERTAIN FIELDS STILL NEEDS TO BE INCREASED. AN EXAMPLE SHE GIVES IS ECONOMICS: "YOU DON'T EVER SEE A WOMAN ECONOMIST... IF THEY'VE GOT AN ECONOMIST QUOTED ON TELEVISION ... IT'S ALWAYS A MAN AND IT'S AN AREA WHERE NOT VERY GOOD AT UNDERSTANDING, PARTLY BECAUSE ITS ALL ABOUT CAPITALISM AND WOMEN WHO ARE INTERESTED IN FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S ISSUES ARE VERY RARELY CAPITALIST IN THEIR THINKING ARE THEY?"

In reflecting on the period and her own involvement, Pat feels that she'd do it all again, although she is sad about some of the disagreements of the time: "The nasty things were the fall-outs ... It's difficult to remember because you kind of put them out of your mind but there were some bloody vicious people about... I remember when we had the women's committee [of the council]... we had this major split... the

women who caused it were really pretty vicious to the rest of us and they kind of had us before a kangaroo court, me and two friends of mine... and were really horrible to us... we really are our own worst enemies when we do that kind of thing. Then there were the big arguments with the 'Wages for Housework' people and that got vicious... I think women are wonderful at co-operating in the main but when they decide not to that's when you get trouble!" For Pat then, her ultimate feeling about the period is that she'd: "Do it all again without the divisiveness. I'm a great one for co-operation!"

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

JILLY

ROSSER



Jilly Rosser is a feminist midwife and yoga teacher. She currently works as a Sure Start midwife near Bristol. Her main feminist involvements have been: women's groups and consciousness raising groups, the Association of Radical Midwives, Journal Editor for the Midwives Information Service (MIDIRS), longstanding campaigns to change the way women and babies are treated during labour and birth and campaigning to have Birth Centres set up.

Jilly was born in Sussex where she lived until she went to a mixed boarding school at the age of ten. She comes from a family of four, two brothers and a sister. Jilly feels that although her mother didn't identify as a feminist: "... she always set an example ... that women are academically and in the workplace absolutely as competent as men." Her mother returned to work once the children were all at school and Jilly feels that in this respect she was provided with a strong, competent role model. Looking back on her childhood, Jilly feels that she was: "... always inherently a feminist really. As a child I hated being sent in to help mother in the kitchen while the boys worked outside with Dad. I always thought it was extremely unfair I was meant to do more in the house than the boys and I also thought it was very unfair that... they were really encouraged and helped to fulfil their sporting potential whereas any sporting potential I might have had was incidental and not really nurtured." Jilly found her teenage years quite difficult and she describes them thus: "...you are being pulled in so many different directions because, as well as seeing yourself as having an equal place with men and boys, there's such... a strong ethos around pleasing men and being pleasing to boys and men. When I look back I think that a huge amount of energy, time and thought was wasted on... getting male approval... I would have very much welcomed somebody just to point that out ...and given me at least the chance to analyse it and decide that was not the way I wanted to be."

After leaving school, Jilly spent a gap year in Ecuador and then went to Manchester University when she was nineteen to read Social Anthropology. It was here that Jilly

began to be more politicised and in a key incident she realised that not all male sexual attention was desirable: “I remember sitting in a pub and being approached by a drunken man who wouldn’t go away and it was the first time that I realised that this was not a flattering episode, it was actually quite insulting and quite derogatory. It was one of those turning points, it was a completely insignificant incident but... from then on I realised that being attractive to men that you weren’t attracted to, getting unwanted sexual attention from men was a very unpleasant experience and I no longer sought it. I feel sorry to see how often women do seek that kind of attention even though when they get it, it is something that is ultimately utterly dissatisfying and can even be almost humiliating...” At university, Jilly met a friend who shared similar views and they both began to identify as feminists. She joined a Women’s Group and a Consciousness Raising Group. Jilly began to read avidly on anything to do with feminism and gender. She also began to listen to feminist music and cites the music of Holly Near as being particularly important to her. She also recalls: “... the terrific strength that became available through women’s consciousness raising and the feeling that you could absolutely do anything, be anywhere and you were part of this very supported network, it was a sisterhood really... [to] find other women who were also going through... an awakening that things didn’t have to be the way they were.” She points out that at this time there were many obvious instances of discrimination against women: “This was of course a time when it was absolutely normal for a woman to be paid less for the same job than a man, when it was still legal to rape your wife. Kids now just have no idea how recently all kinds of laws have changed.”

Jilly dropped out of university after a year, went travelling in Latin America and settled for a while in California. At age twenty-one she decided she wanted to develop a skill and a career and she began to think about what to do with her life. Her decision to become a midwife was: “absolutely, *directly* because I had become a feminist and had that world view”. She describes the decision process thus: “I certainly wanted to work with women doing something that had at least the potential to be helpful. I wanted a job where I could travel to any part of the world, I’d always had a strong draw towards the biological sciences... and that’s what made me plump for being a midwife.” During her midwifery training in Derby, Jilly was shocked at the way women and babies were treated during labour and birth: “Everything I saw and did there reinforced the views and perspectives that I’d gained from learning about feminism. If there’s one way in which patriarchy is expressed, it’s around pregnancy and childbirth and if there is one way that women in this country are still hugely oppressed it’s through childbirth and the ‘care’ that’s on offer during pregnancy and when they have their babies...” Jilly also found that much of the way that hospitals handled birth was very interventionist and as such conflicted with her basic principles. However she found that “the doctors and midwives seem to think it was OK and totally necessary”. At times Jilly found herself in quite a lonely position and she actively sought support and sisterhood from like-minded midwives. Luckily some of the other trainees: “... had a similar world view which included embracing feminism. We lived together and supported each other and when we came home from work with horror stories we could tell them to one another. Without that support I think I would have found it extremely difficult to get through.” Jilly joined the Association of Radical Midwives in the late 1970’s which she regards as one of the most important steps in her practice as a feminist midwife. She describes the experience thus: “We would meet every six weeks at somebody’s house for the weekend... It would be a wonderful opportunity to debrief. To share these awful

stories and to talk about them in a way we couldn't in our work place because everybody there seemed to think [the way women were treated] was OK." She regards her involvement with the Radical Midwives associations as: "a sisterhood between midwives... to get together with that same world view and support one another and systematically define the experiences we were seeing and put that within the understanding of an utterly patriarchal approach to birth. I think we all felt we survived those years through that kind of help." Jilly is very grateful that she had become a feminist before she trained as a midwife because she has seen women become feminists after they had been practising for years and she has observed that, for them to realise the system of 'care' they had been inflicting on women was oppressive and against women's interests can be a painful awakening.

After her training finished, Jilly decided to leave the UK as she couldn't find an environment in which she wanted to work: "I certainly didn't want to work in a hospital and I didn't want to work in community midwifery because there were no home births any more ... you just went around to their homes and tried to care for mothers and babies who'd been through a horrible hospital birth. That kind of work was not really of interest to me." Instead a friend from the Radical Midwives Association invited Jilly out to the Yemen and she became employed as a midwife over there. Jilly feels that she had: "...[a] stereotypical view of Arab countries being all desert and camels and women clothed from head to toe in black. I was very surprised to find this extraordinary mountain scenery and a vibrant ancient culture." Jilly was very happy in the Yemen: "I absolutely loved it there. I loved being at least 5 hours walk up a mountain from the nearest road. I loved then, as perhaps I wouldn't now, being completely free of doctors and hospitals...I was completely autonomous in my practice." Jilly also loved being in an all-female environment as women didn't interact much with men unless they were family. She actually found the dress restrictions a positive thing: "People assumed I would [object] because everybody knew that I had a feminist view and assumed that I would find it oppressive. But I have... never found dressing modestly oppressive. I quite liked not dressing in order to attract male sexual attention." She also found the lack of emphasis on flirting and being sexually pleasing to men to be quite liberating: "The fact that there wasn't that expectation was nice and to have those kinds of modest relationships with men, there was no flirtation, there was friendship... but there was none of this sexual innuendo and I loved being free of it all."

Jilly was also interested to see what happened when women were a second wife. An arrangement which is: "so opposed to the monogamous ideal we hold so dear in the west. Something you'd think from the outside world must be inherently oppressive to women but actually ... if you did away with the assumption that you would be jealous of the other wife, there were a lot of advantages to it. You got a lot of help with the domestic work, a lot of help with the work in the fields and a lot of help with childcare. At best you got companionship and I saw it working just as well as many monogamous marriages or partnerships in this country." Jilly felt it was an education to live among Yemeni women and to learn about their culture in a way that made her more conscious of her own basic assumptions. She also stayed there long enough to witness important social changes such as a road being built which Jilly was sad about because she enjoyed the feeling of remoteness and community. She discusses its impact thus: "Previous to the road coming... most women in their daily lives ... would just wear a small headscarf and save the black head-to-toe covering for when they

went to town or went on a journey to an unknown place and were exposed to men outside their normal range. [However] They would talk about how once the road was there they would have to cover up their faces because there would be this constant exposure to unknown men and it is worth saying that this pressure came from the *women themselves*. It was not their husband saying ‘you must cover up’ because it was a deeply held view that to be modest was the right way to be and therefore you don’t need the men to impose that on women.” Jilly has also travelled in Africa and she draws a comparison with the pressure to inflict female genital mutilation, which was again strongest from women. However, Jilly does stress that: “there are many ways in which women weren’t oppressed in Yemen that women *are* oppressed in this society.” She points out how judgemental we can be of other cultures without really examining our own: “People are horrified that women would dress from head-to-toe in black because of some perceived requirement on behalf of men. I can’t say I find it an awful lot more shocking than women wearing fantastically uncomfortable high-heeled shoes and short skirts really. It’s a different manifestation but it’s exactly the same mindset. Putting your body into very uncomfortable and impractical clothing as an essential prerequisite to being accepted in your social group.”

Jilly was hungry to find out about birth in different parts of the world so she travelled widely in America, New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, Burma, India and Nepal. She stayed with other midwives and learnt about how birth was managed/supported in different cultures. Her travel involved: “Seeing these pockets of women across the globe who shared this perspective that modern childbirth was a form of appalling oppression to women and who were all working in their different ways...trying to humanise labour wards... all sharing this view that the dominant way that things were done was not the right one, was not in women’s best interests.” Jilly recounts how: “In Yemen the traditional birth attendants were... so lovely and warm and they would often cry with the woman when she was in pain. When a woman was having a baby the room would fill up with her neighbours and anybody else who’d had a baby...[they would] be with her and support her and they would never interfere with her but would pray with her and sit with her however long her labour and if there was a bad outcome, if the baby died then that was accepted, it was God’s will.” Unfortunately in Africa, Jilly found the birth attendants were not nearly so woman-friendly. When Jilly was living in Guinea Bissau in West Africa she was taken by another midwife to visit a remote island, which was said to be a ‘living matriarchy’. Jilly was fascinated to know what childbirth would be like in a living matriarchy: “I had preconceived ideas that it would be very supportive and perhaps along the lines of what I’d seen in the Yemen and it was not so, *it was not so*. The births there were even more interventionist than on the mainland. One of the items available in all villages was a big wooden pole with which the women pounded rice, which was thinner in the middle where the hands held it and heavy at either end... This huge pounder would be taken up by two women when a woman was in labour and the thinner part of it laid across the pregnant woman’s abdomen and the birth attendants would be at either ends on the heavy ends pushing down to make this baby come out quicker! It’s the sort of interventionism that would make the labour wards in our country look *kind*... I have never got my head around how in a society which is essentially matriarchal could have such a brutal and non-intuitive approach to birth... It is just part of this mystery around how childbirth gets expressed in so many different ways culturally. In this country too its just a cultural expression of how we view the world.”

Jilly met her husband in Guinea Bissau and briefly lived almost as his second wife! They both came back to England when Jilly became pregnant with her daughter. Initially they settled in London where Jilly began working as an independent midwife working with women who wanted a home birth but were not able to get them through the NHS. She had been practising as an independent midwife for a year when a very unfortunate incident took place that was to have dramatic repercussions: “I was at a home birth where the mother collapsed after the birth... she needed to go into hospital and I took her in. She and the baby were fine but notwithstanding I was struck off the professional register in a case that was very high profile at the time (1985-6) and which took a pretty heavy personal toll on me. I was a bit of a ‘cause celebre’ in as much as the papers happily chose to view me as a victim of a miscarriage of justice, which of course I think I was, and portrayed it as such. It was polarised, as I suppose things in the papers always are and midwives’ responses to me were polarised as well...every midwife in the country knew my name and had some strong view on the case one way or the other. I was either a pioneering voice for oppressed midwifery and oppressed women who had put her own career on the line to stand up for what she believed in...[or] I was viewed by midwives as some terribly dangerous, self-opinionated ... midwife who was much too big for her boots and had got her just desserts and that’s what comes of helping women have home births etc...” Jilly points out that neither perception is strictly true as she was: “... just trying to quietly get on with having my own midwifery practice in North London. I wasn’t trying to prove anything to anybody. I was just trying to practise in the way that I believed in.” Jilly felt uncomfortable with the notoriety that surrounded the case and she was deeply upset by the lack of identity that she experienced: “When you are removed from the register as a midwife, you can’t practise... It was very strange having my identity taken away from me and you realise that your professional identity is such a strong part of you. It was like losing a limb really.” Luckily some “totally wonderful people” supported Jilly, and eventually the High Court overruled the finding of professional misconduct, and she was reinstated.

By the time that Jilly was re-instated she had two young children and she eventually decided she could no longer practise as an independent midwife because she couldn’t be on call all the time due to childcare commitments. Instead, Jilly began to be involved with the Midwives Information and Resource Service (MIDIRS). This organisation was based in Bristol, which is why Jilly moved to Bristol in 1989. Jilly and her colleagues at MIDIRS were appalled at the amount of interventions that were becoming increasingly common during hospital managed births. She points out that many of these interventions are unpleasant and unnecessary and many have detrimental consequences for women and babies. Moreover, women were not being informed about the consequences of certain forms of ‘care’ and not given rights or choices. She explains: “The idea behind MIDIRS was to get together the research and tell midwives the results of the research and they’d see that all these horrible interventions and getting more women into hospital and doing all these nasty things to them in the long run doesn’t even work well and doesn’t even give better outcomes.” Jilly was the editor of the MIDIRS journal for ten years and she describes the function of the journal as being to: “... put out this information to midwives in an attempt to empower them to be able to take on doctors on their own ground... to do our own research on the kinds of things we thought were important for women and baby’s well-being so that we had valid arguments for opposing the different forms of

intervention like all these inductions that were going on, breaking of the water, enemas, episiotomies and shaving. All the stuff that was completely routine by that stage.”

Jilly feels positive about her involvement with MIDIRS and proud of the organisation’s success. However, she points out that one of the things this involvement taught her is that “... the reason things were and continue to be as they are, are essentially completely *irrational*... they were technological but not scientific. These interventions were never introduced because somebody had appraised them... they’d been introduced because it seemed like a good idea. So it seemed like if you belted a monitor on a woman – put a couple of belts around her, one to measure the contractions and one to keep an eye on the baby’s heartbeat... that must make labour safer. Years later there is this massive body of evidence to say it doesn’t make birth any safer, babies don’t survive any better but what we do get is a pretty substantial increase in caesarean sections when this technology is used. But once [labour interventions] have been introduced into practice it’s so hard to get them out again... even when, as has been the case for many years now, the evidence is overwhelmingly against their use. It’s a matter of opinion why this is the case. There is of course a very strong lobby pro the use of these kinds of technologies, that is the people who manufacture and sell them but there is not really a strong coherent lobby against, although there are a lot of people who’ve been calling for common sense for a long time... I just think it’s the mindset of those who subscribe to an essentially technocratic view of the world that more machines and more measuring, more numbers and more observation, more analysis must make things safer. Which in the case of a normal process such as birth is a completely flawed idea.” Jilly is proud of the impact that MIDIRS had but she feels sad that: “... it didn’t in the end in any massive way, really alter the power relationship between midwives and doctors or more importantly between *women* and doctors and the medical body.” Jilly also became incredibly well informed through her work for MIDIRS as she read through lots of research every day. However she points out that: “... my understanding after I had assimilated and worked through all that information was *exactly* the same as it was before I started: that interventions on women whether in pregnancy, childbirth or after should be used only with the greatest reluctance. The damage that can be inflicted by interfering with a natural process is very substantial.”

Jilly points out that this area is incredibly relevant to feminism because: “... the number of women who are actually giving birth under their own power is tiny and the number of women who are subjected to an undignified experience, a disempowering experience, a frightening or even utterly traumatising experience is massive. There are 600 thousand births in this country every year and many of these are very deeply unsatisfying to the women and one can only suppose to the babies. It does seem to be the most extraordinary blind spot in our thinking that this continues against a fairly good body of evidence and a lot of people who see it for what it is... Collectively women’s belief that birth can be a normal natural process has been deeply undermined. In the area where I work it’s the second and third generation of women who view inductions, epidurals, acceleration, being in hospital strapped up to machines as the normal and safe way to give birth and to do it in any way differently would be a difficult weaning process.” Jilly is currently a ‘Sure Start’ midwife in Bristol. ‘Sure Start’ is a government initiative for targeting resources at areas of social and economic deprivation. She describes her role thus: “I have a remit to try to

increase the role of breastfeeding, to work with women who have postnatal depression, and to work with smoking in pregnancy to try to reduce the number of babies who are born small. I do other things like give enhanced care to teenagers who are pregnant and generally work towards helping women feel supported and part of a network of caring... it's unsatisfactory in that it doesn't include the opportunity to provide them with a different birth experience which is very frustrating. All that's on offer for them still is a home birth which not many of them take up, most of them being in council flats, or to go and give birth in the main hospital in the hands of people who find childbirth an experience which needs to be controlled and interfered with." She feels the position has been: "...educational for me in terms of seeing how far women's confidence in themselves has been depleted, particularly in breastfeeding... I believe all areas of socio-economic deprivation are areas of very low breastfeeding rates and women's discomfiture with the idea of breastfeeding is so deep and again second and third generation now."

Jilly is still passionate that childbirth should be reformed to "become rational and kind and based on a deep respect for the normal process and the notion that you can't improve on a good natural birth. That's not to say all births will be good natural births. There will be some births that will be difficult and will need intervention, everybody recognises that..." Jilly is currently involved in campaigning to set up birth centres which she describes as: "small community-based units where any woman could go to in pregnancy to get care and any woman who is not anticipating major problems during her birth could have her baby in an environment where normality is positively promoted and protected and where *kindness* is the prevailing ethos and where the midwives are highly trained in creating an atmosphere in which normal birth can most easily occur and supporting women through that." Jilly points out that this form of care is actually fairly cheap and natural births are less costly in financial terms than using unnecessary intervention. Thus the campaigning lobby are managing slowly to get the government on their side amid concerns about escalating caesarean rates. She points out that: "There's a strong sense throughout the health service that people should receive care that is appropriate to their level of need... childbirth fits into that perfectly so that the resources would be there for women and babies who really need it and not for the women and babies who'd be better off without being interfered with. I'm sure the time will come when there will be [lots of] birth centres. There are already quite a few and I think it's unstoppable now." Besides campaigning for birth centres to be established, Jilly is very keen on working in one as she feels they embody a more woman-centred ethic where you take account of each woman's particular need and "fit the care to meet the women." She feels that: "... to speak to any woman about her experience of childbirth in general, what matters to her and what her priorities are, are *massively* different to the priorities of those providing the services. If we were to start today with a clean sheet of paper... and were to design maternity services which were optimised to make it safe for woman and babe and make the experience as positive and wholesome as possible without an outrageous expenditure of money or anything else that was completely unrealistic or unsustainable... what we would come up with would look *nothing* like what we currently have in place."

Jilly points out that the neglect of birth within feminism is puzzling as it is the prime example of an oppression of women on a collective level and yet 'bad births' are often portrayed as an essentially individual experience: "women who are in their

professional life or personal life powerful, balanced and knowledgeable can still find themselves when they go to have their babies, overwhelmed in a system where their own experience seems absolutely individualised... as if it's just them who feels completely powerless... in the throes of labour and things are not going as they would wish that's still [seen as] an inherently individual experience [and yet]... it is essentially an absolutely collective experience. It's the experience of our generation, our culture...you go into any hospital in the world and the women... will be having undignified, interfered-with births. Changing that from an individual experience to a collective experience, the time is well beyond ripe for that." For Jilly, the way her feminism has been expressed is through her work with women and she feels that: "the 'raison d'etre' of my professional life is to change the way that childbirth is experienced by women and babies."

Interviewed by Ilona Singer over two occasions.

FIONA WILLIAMS



Fiona Williams is currently Professor of Social Policy at the University of Leeds. Her main feminist involvements have been: *Women's Voice* magazine, Plymouth Women's Liberation Group, National Abortion Campaign, Women's Health Campaigns, Plymouth Women's Aid, Reclaim the Night, Greenham Support Group, Women Against Fundamentalism, European Forum of Left Feminists, helping to set up and teaching on Women's Studies courses at the Open University and Plymouth Polytechnic. She has also been involved in developing feminist ideas as an academic within social policy.

Fiona is the youngest of three children (she has two elder brothers). Her parents were from working class backgrounds but by the time Fiona was born her father had become a professional engineer. She describes her parents as being socialists who were also "well-read, interesting people". Up until 1951 Fiona lived in Egypt as her father was working in Cairo. She feels the collective experience of this in her family was formative: "I think that had quite an impact on how we understood things in terms of the wider context of end of Empire. My parents were against the intervention in Suez in 1956, and all of those discussions not only made me aware of politics, but wary of popular prejudice and discrimination. There was a lot of anti-'Arab' feeling at this time which I knew from my own experiences was rubbish". Fiona was later brought up in Ilkley in Yorkshire where she attended the local grammar school. She remembers being a 'tomboy' and a teacher describing her as "... one of those bluestocking suffragette types. [Fiona] thought it was a terrible slur... like a thirteen year old being told she was a feminist today...". Fiona was the first member of her family to go to university and she chose to study Sociology and Social Administration at Bedford College (University of London) which had been one of the first women's colleges.

In 1968, when she had finished her first degree, Fiona was awarded a Commonwealth scholarship to study in Nigeria and she began a PhD on the impact of imperialism on women. She began to read widely on gender politics and describes this reading as inspiring. However the PhD topic was out of kilter with academic work at the time.

“The idea that you should do a sociological study on women was seen as quite ridiculous because the work that was done on women tended to be small scale anthropological work rather than anything to do with wider politics. Most of the political work was on trade unions, which at that point in Nigeria didn’t include women. Most of the stuff on imperialism wasn’t about women either”. Fiona became seriously ill with cerebral malaria and when she recovered she decided to stay in England, initially to continue the PhD but she: “... decided politics was more pressing. Doing a PhD was seen as a bit of a ‘bourgeois diversion’”. Fiona became a part-time lecturer in London but by this stage her political involvements were her “... main mission in life.” She joined the International Socialists and became involved in the development of their *Women’s Voice* magazine. Fiona began to write articles for *Women’s Voice* and to be generally active in left politics. She remembers one of the key debates of the time among I.S. as being: “...whether any developing women’s movement should have its own autonomy or whether it should be attached to socialist organisations. There was a lot of argument about that.” Being involved with left politics was important in the development of her feminism in that : “... I was part of a political organisation [i.e. International Socialists] in which women were very active but women’s issues were rather subordinate to ‘worker’ issues. Groups such as ROW (Rights of Women) were beginning to have much more thought-out strategies around women and inequality.” Fiona felt this even more after having her children and eventually left International Socialists around 1984 because of the lack of analysis of issues around both gender and ‘race’.

In 1974, Fiona moved to Plymouth with her then partner. Fiona describes Plymouth as being: “... a total culture shock as a woman because, having lived in London, things like going into a pub on your own that you could have done in London easily, you couldn’t do in Plymouth... The fact that we were co-habiting was seen as dreadful. It seemed very provincial, it was a garrison town and in some ways quite right-wing.” Fiona had her first child in 1976 and attended one of the first women’s group meetings in Plymouth with her baby daughter. She remembers mothering as being a source of discussion and ambivalence for herself and her contemporaries. The group met regularly and became the basis of women’s politics in Plymouth. Fiona points out that unlike the women activists she had met in London who tended to be graduates, the Plymouth group was quite mixed: “It was a combination of women graduates, women who’d dropped out and been part of the hippy trail and working class women who were involved through the labour movement or were going back into education as mature students.” Through this group Fiona became involved in helping to set up Plymouth Women’s Aid, which was established around 1974. They also set up a larger women’s group through the local WEA and set up a pregnancy testing service at Virginia House (a local community centre).

Fiona remembers taking part in a ‘Reclaim the Night’ march through the centre of Plymouth. Her group also became involved with the National Abortion Campaign (NAC). She felt personally very involved with NAC and the women’s health campaigns: “I think through having my children, and I’d also been a social worker for a short time as well, I was aware of how horrifically doctors treated women. We had a very good campaign. I remember we had a public meeting in Plymouth in the Guildhall and there must have been about 300 women there to demand better services for women and to establish a *well-woman* clinic. We did a big questionnaire around Plymouth women’s attitudes to and experiences of health and we held a number of

meetings. The response from women was overwhelming and we managed to get on to the local NHS organising committee and get the rudiments of a *well-woman* centre set up and also got all sorts of other things on the agenda". Fiona feels her group were influenced and inspired by the Boston Women's Health Collective (who published the famous *Our Bodies Ourselves* women's health manual). Fiona remembers her group inviting a woman from the collective to speak at a meeting that was held on a Plymouth council estate. "We were amazed at the numbers of women who came along. It was on the menopause. We were all young things then but had caught on to the fact with our questionnaire that what really upset women was the way they were treated with menopausal symptoms... all these women turned up. Women in their forties, fifties and sixties. I remember the American woman called hot flushes hot 'flashes' and told this group of women that they had to 'enjoy their hot flashes as though they were orgasms!' And I think they were really shocked."

Fiona feels that being in Plymouth at that time as part of a small group of women activists was very influential: "I think we were quite wide in our politics. We were involved in a lot of stuff because we were few and far between down there... After the Leeds 'Beyond the Fragments' Conference we held our own for Devon and Cornwall... So we were quite locked into debates that were going on nationally. I think we saw ourselves as this outpost of just-beginning feminism and thinking in the south west and what we had to do was make sure all of these debates were aired and discussed." Earlier experiences had made her aware of issues of 'race' and difference and she remembers issues of difference, particularly class difference being discussed within her group: "There were disagreements, for example around whether you could take your boy child into the women's centre, but they tended not to completely split the group... I think that was because there weren't a lot of us and we needed each other." She became involved in the Claimants' Union and through this met other women political activists. Fiona and her group were also involved in visiting the Greenham Women's Peace Camp and regular bus trips to Greenham took place.

After Fiona's son was born in 1978 she was still working as a part-time lecturer for Plymouth Polytechnic. She also became a tutor on the Open University's first Women's Studies course. She met many other interesting women through her involvement with the OU and Plymouth Polytechnic and helped to set up a Women and Welfare State course at the polytechnic. She became involved in women's issues in relation to academia and research and began to campaign around equality issues in relation to the curriculum. Fiona had a close friend called Jean Whitfield whom she describes as a key organiser of Claimants' Union activism in Plymouth. In 1984 Jean died tragically of leukaemia and a few months later Fiona's mother died. Fiona feels this was a "... turning point...when I began to re-assess feminist politics a bit". Fiona was also involved with another local women's group with an interesting beginning: "We called ourselves the 'Heavy Women's Group' because we'd started out as an advert from someone who'd lived in a place called 'Meavy' who put an advert in the paper but they'd made a mistake and put 'heavy' women's group which we all thought was quite appropriate really!" Fiona describes this group as largely comprising of writers and artists. She felt the group provided vital support for women who were taking their feminism into their creative and professional work.

In 1987 Fiona moved to Leeds and then went to work at the Open University doing research on women and learning disabilities. She describes this work as being

‘challenging’ on a personal and a political level. By this time she was also doing research into areas of social policy and the welfare state that were informed by her grass roots activism. Some of her research on the welfare state was about comparing the situation in the UK to the situation in Hungary. This helped Fiona to re-examine some of the early feminist demands: “I think one of the things I was aware of through doing that, was the idea that what women wanted was full-time employment... it was the sort of demand that you needed to put but actually I didn’t think it was a solution. In Hungary you could see that women had got full-time employment but actually... it was full-time employment but in a male model of working. When you talked to women in Hungary they would say we don’t want this because we are absolutely knackered. We work an eight-hour day and we go home and do the cooking and all the rest of it. We don’t want children in crèches twenty four hours a day or twelve hours a day because we want to have some contact with our children.” This experience had a deep influence on Fiona and she realised the complexity of some of the issues: “There needs to be more understanding of how we link all these caring activities and don’t downgrade them. I think that’s still a point of contention.” As a mother of two young children who also worked full time, Fiona initially found it difficult to get involved in feminist activities in Leeds. She became involved with ‘Women Against Fundamentalism’ in the late 1980’s and also joined the European Forum of Left Feminists. Her academic and feminist interests began to converge and, with other feminist academics in social policy, she published work which was influential in getting the issues of both gender and ‘race’ to be considered as central questions in understanding the welfare state. She also became involved in networks of women with similar research interests in different countries who had been involved in the Women’s Movement at the same time.

In terms of the achievements of the period, Fiona feels that the National Abortion Campaign did very good work as: “...defending abortion rights and the turn when it became reproductive rights was very important. Defending women’s reproductive rights is absolutely crucial... I’ve often thought I’d lay down my life for that. In the twentieth century it has become an important material basis for women that they can actually begin to determine their own lives around reproduction.” She points out though that feminism’s relation to this issue has not always been straightforward, for instance some early feminists such as Marie Stopes were actually in favour of eugenics! She points out that the debate about who has the right to bear children is an ongoing societal concern that feminism has not settled. She also feels the WLM was very important in raising awareness around the issue of domestic violence and sexual abuse: “I think [the WLM was responsible for] opening up those areas of power that could never be spoken about. Power between women and men in the private sphere or the way professional men like doctors treated women, the way institutions treated women.” She also feels the development of Black feminism was very important and really forced ‘white’ feminism to look hard at itself, as were the discussions around sexuality issues. “The development of gay and lesbian politics... has changed society. There’s more of a ‘queering’ of society now and certainly (though it is not universal) a much better attitude to issues around sexuality. In fact my partner is now a woman so I’ve moved myself, but my children and their friends have all taken that in their stride and that must be some sign of progress, not that I believe in progress as such...” She feels these types of issues “gave us the wider picture.”

The issue of division of labour in the home is an important topic, which Fiona feels was raised by feminism. She points out though that the current economic climate in which families often have to have two wage earners has made this issue all the more pressing for women now. Fiona feels that: "Lone parents still get a bad press, but attitudes to having a child outside marriage have changed. I don't know how far that's to do with the Women's Movement or how far it's part of more general social change... the acceptance of a woman's right to have children on their own is still fought over and the question of who cares for children, when and how, is a central one that hasn't been resolved at all." She is disappointed that relatively little progress has been made with regard to childcare and feels this is still an issue worth fighting for. She also feels that: "...there was a sense with New Labour when they came in, that, in a way, questions which feminism had raised had kind of been settled... you could mainstream feminism now. I just don't think that's right in relation to women, in relation to 'race', racism and ethnicity, in relation to disability, to sexuality. Yes there's more tolerance but you need more than tolerance... I still think those inequalities are there." She points out that: "women who've got degrees may be able to earn as much as men until they have children, but certainly women who don't have degrees aren't doing so well and the sorts of conditions of the jobs that women have to work in are actually a lot worse." She points out that the Economic and Social Research Council has: "just decided to launch a major research initiative on the persistence of gender inequalities and it's quite interesting that there hasn't been a big research programme of that nature until now."

In terms of her hopes for the future, Fiona reflects upon how her daughter (aged 26), "... has so much more confidence. Watching her go through school from the age of thirteen onwards, the support that she and her friends gave each other in relation to boyfriends, sexuality... all sorts of things. It's a great relief to me that she is so confident in that respect..." She feels that attitudes have shifted in that: "if it came to questions like domestic violence or having a boyfriend that treated you badly she and her friends would be supportive to help their friends get out of such a relationship [in contrast with women in the past who] ... used to feel ashamed but they would feel that they ought to be strong enough to withstand the behaviour so they'd still take individual responsibility..." However, Fiona's daughter works in television which is not so enlightened with regard to gender issues: "She thinks it's incredibly sexist in terms of pay scales and everything because basically you have to negotiate every new job that you go into and she said they will respond better to blokes than they will to women in all these sorts of things so she's very aware that the dice are loaded against her in terms of when she might have children." Her son also is "... very aware of not wanting to act out his privileges as a man. Although he often says "Oh well, having been brought up with two powerful women it is very difficult for me you know!" ... He had to work hard to carve out a place for himself ... he's come out of it a very pleasant young man but it was quite tough for him because in the early days of feminism you had to be very careful not to make your boy children ashamed of being boys."

Fiona is currently working on a research project about the ethics of care: "... being able to get the policy-makers to think through what it means because they are pushing the ethic of work very strongly and one of our arguments is that you can't have an ethic of work without having an ethic of care, and that means re-thinking things in society, it means re-thinking time and space. What does it mean to have a safe space

so that people are able to carry out the caring responsibilities properly and so on...What sorts of policies should you have at work? Should we work on the basis of annualised hours so people are freer to take their time off to care more flexibly? Should people who don't have children also have a right to have time off? Care, and by that I mean the activities people are involved in taking care of themselves and their children, their loved ones and their friends, is such a central part of people's lives. People these days are really concerned about their relationships, whether they are doing the right thing by their children or partner, but generally, this is the poor relation when it comes to policies, it is always subsumed under work and production. These days parents are supposed to be bringing up their children to get their education, get a job and that is what it means to be a good citizen. But surely citizenship is about more than this? There is still the tendency to make invisible the emotional and physical work that goes into our intimate and close relationships, much of which is done by women. Making this visible, giving it respect and recognition whilst not reinforcing it as 'women's work' has been the struggle of feminists for over a century. If I manage by the end of this research – or even my lifetime – to get these issues of care and intimacy seriously onto a political and social agenda, I would be very happy.”

Interviewed by Ilona Singer

The Interview Questions

Can you tell me about your early background?

What factors and experiences led you to get involved in feminist campaigns?

How did your involvement progress from there?

What achievements do you feel were made at the time?

What do you feel is relevant about those achievements now?

AFTERWORD

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The main aim of The Feminist Archive is to collect and preserve material from the 1960's to the present day. It houses national and international material including periodicals, books, photographs, posters, banners, films, conference papers, personal diaries, badges, audiotapes and disks, and general ephemera.

We need more donations! If you have material you would like to donate, please contact us to arrange collection.

