

**Working Together: recording and preserving the heritage of the workers' co-operative movement**

**Ref no:**

**Name:** Anni Townend

**Worker Co-ops involved in:** Down to Earth, Sheffield

**Date of recording:** 23/04/2018

**Location of interview:** Barbican House, Lewes

**Name of interviewer:** Philippa Lewis

**Number of tracks:** 1

**Recording Format:** Wav 16bit 48 khz

**Recording equipment:** Zoom H2 Handy Recorder

**Total Duration:** 00:58:16

**Additional Material:**

**Copyright/clearance:**

**Transcript compiled by:** Kat Broomfield

**Number of transcript pages:** 17

**Interviewer's comments:**

## **Summary:**

[00:00:08] General discussion of worker co-operatives in Sheffield. [00:04:00] Anni Townend discusses how she first came to be involved in Down to Earth. [00:08:22] Discusses previous awareness of co-operatives. [00:12:47] Discussion of the interview process at Down to Earth. [00:17:12] Anni discusses her particular interest in the type of working at Down to Earth. [00:20:39] Discusses the setting up of DtE. [00:30:18] Talks about links with/awareness of other workers co-ops/networks, including Suma. [00:33:38] Discusses decision making within the co-op. [00:37:20] Discussion of feminism within the co-op. [00:38:52] Talks about involvement with Down to Earth and Lifespan (housing collective) involvement with ICOM. [00:47:53] Discusses leaving Down to Earth to join Lifespan (housing collective.) [00:50:40] Talks about career as leadership consultant and executive coach, after being involved in Down to Earth and Lifespan, and values within this. [

**Transcript:**

[00:00:08]

*Interviewer: So that's recording now, but, we can kind of edit out eating bits and bits at the beginning. I just want to check that it's definitely going...ok - I'll let you eat yours first*

Anni: Well, it's interesting that I've chosen to eat a very healthy kind of granola, *vegan granola, bar*

*...linked in to...*

Exactly

*Wholefoods.*

And certainly for a while, for a while when I worked at Down to Earth, I was a vegan.

*Mm, ok. I was trying to work out where Down to Earth is, in Sheffield, because I couldn't remember whether it was one of the ones that I've been past for ages and didn't realise it was a worker co-op.*

Well it's not a cooperative anymore

*No*

Sharrow..., Sharrow Vale Road

*I know the name, I think my friend lives off it*

Sheffield 10 is where it, what it was in, it may be in, obviously it's still in that area, but it will have a different postcode, but Sharrow Vale road, is it Hunters Bar?

*Yeah, oh ok*

Leading up onto, into, a big garden, is how I remember it, sort of...

*Is it Endcliffe park at the end of there or am I thinking of elsewhere?*

Maybe, that rings a bell too.

*Yeah*

*My geography of that area of that bit of Sheffield is slightly patchy.*

It is, it is all in that area, Sharrow Vale Road where Down to Earth was, and there still is a shop there

*Oh ok*

...but that's where we were.

*I feel I must have walked past it at some point, and just not realised, or not gone in or anything. It's interesting. There's another up by where I used to live, what's it called? It's up in Crookes and it's a wholefood kind of worker coop. I think it's still a worker cooperative actually. Oh, what's it called...might be Beanies? I'm not sure. No, I can't remember now. But yeah, there seemed to be a few in Sheffield scattered around.*

Well it would be interesting if you do get to speak to Richard because he and his friends, started by, and I think they lived in Crookesmoor, in Harcourt Road, I'm guessing that was the name of the place, and they were bringing, or he was bringing, large bags of rice, flour, etc, up to where they lived, and in Harcourt Road, which I think is in Crookesmoor. I think it is up there?

*That big long one*

And people went there too, with their bag, and then they, you know, they served people from their living room, effectively from these big sacks. They had a conversation with a person that he was doing this with, and another friend, decided that it was time, maybe to think bigger and differently, and form a Wholefood Cooperative.

[00:04:00]

*And so that was the start of Down To Earth?*

Well, that was the start, the start of an idea. And I was a friend of Phil's, Phil Roddis who was one of the three, so there was Richard, Phil and this other friend of theirs. This other friend of theirs, was not going to be involved, I don't think, in the cooperative but was part of the interviewing process.

*Right, yes*

So at the time, the fact that there was an interviewing process, for this, formation, felt very grown up to me, that I was going for an interview. It was Phil, who was my friend, who had suggested to me that it might be something that I would enjoy; helping to set up, because I had just finished my degree in Communication Studies. I think he was about to go on it. It was the first time it had ever been run, when I did it, and we knew each other through another mutual friend, and he suggested coming along for an interview, and so I did. I went to Rossington Road, which is where Richard lived, or certainly where - I'm not sure that he necessarily lived there - but it was definitely where we had the interviews, from memory. I didn't know that I would then live there. And I lived there, eventually, because the person Richard did live with went to America for a year, and he had a lot of house plants and he needed them looking after. He was a cook and a chef and he run another wholefood cooperative called The Brick Rabbit.

*I feel I've heard of it*

Yes I think you may have heard of it

*But I've not spoken to anyone involved in it*

Well he cooked at the Brick Rabbit and Richard, who was known as Dick, then, performed there. There was this space and Richard had formed a drama group called Phrenological Head when he was at University and that's where I had first set eyes on him as was, as a performer at the space at the Brick Rabbit. I actually lived with people who worked at the Brick Rabbit which is where I met them, and so I knew these people. I didn't know Richard, known as Dick, I didn't know him, so when I went for the interview, there was Dick and Phil and their friend, and their friend who was not going to be part of, but they did need, I imagine they needed at least three people to form the cooperative, maybe more. Phil and the friend really warmed to me, and thought that I would complement, and be the very thing that they were looking for. Richard wasn't too sure about me. At all. I think he thought I was too much of a hippy, and, uh, I was a hippy. And they, absolutely were sure, I was the right person. I think I was, and probably Richard was right as well, because what I loved was the formation of the cooperative and the philosophy of all that came with it.

[00:08:22]

*And were you aware of cooperatives before this?*

Not especially, but I had a [pause] because I was very keen to think differently about the way in which people worked, in the way in which they lived and so working cooperatively and being part of a cooperative really interested me, and I was also really interested in, you know, the way in which food was bought and sold and where it came from, but particularly in what became our ambition that eventually we wouldn't exist and that sort of, recycling and reusing bags and that kind of thing would be commonplace, and everyday, and that wholefoods would be on sale having been fairly traded somewhere, in big supermarkets. That was always our ambition. There was a bit of a tidal wave at the time, and not only were we forming the cooperative, but there were other cooperatives far and wide from Sheffield. There were more wholefood cooperatives in the south than in the north, for sure. And one of the things that I really liked about how we worked in the cooperative, was that we all did every job even though we were better at some jobs than others, but in that we rotated everything. Once we had formed and once we had got the shop, we had a warehouse too and van and once we got the other two people who joined us, one of whom Jem, who was known then as Gup, and the other of whom was Sally, who I mentioned lives in Columbia. And we all bought different things for sure, and we are all very, very different characters. I can send you a photo of our reunion - I can show it to you while we're here of that reunion, of that core group of us. Then we were joined by Hugo who came a bit later, and probably stayed on later than the others of us actually.

*So what year was - yeah go for it [Anni eating]- I'll ask whilst you're eating*

Ok.

*What year was this, or what year was Down to Earth actually formed? When did you interview?*

So, what I'll do, is it off at the moment?

*No, it's on at the moment but I can edit these bits out where I'm coughing and you're eating.*

When I'm chewing my vegan bar!

*I was just checking to see whether it was recording - I always check about 10 minutes in. Just to make sure!*

Very wise! Was it recording?

*It is recording, yeah. Is it nice, the vegan bar?*

Mmmm, yes. I hope yours is! I'm working it out in my mind...and I would suggest, but, I can double check the exact dates, but it would have been in the mid to late seventies...when it was formed – late seventies, I would say, yeah.

[00:12:47]

*And I'm kind of interested a bit in the interview; what did that involve? What sort of things did they ask?*

Mmm the interview, what I totally remember is walking up Rossington Road to the interview – in what, and I remember what I wore to this day, and I had chosen it especially for the interview and it must have been summer, or perhaps it was a day like today you know? Kind of spring into summer. Because I was wearing an Indian cloth skirt, but what was unusual was that I had something matching on the top, or something that was of the same fabric which I had carefully chosen, I think. And, as I remember it, the interview was not downstairs but upstairs. I may have got that wrong. I remember the room being very light and I remember these three men sitting there and Richard was sitting on a rocking chair, and then there was Chris, this friend of Phil and Richard - the three of them and me, and uh, I don't think I was particularly nervous, and I don't really remember their questions especially; but Phil must have told me enough for me to be able to talk about why I was interested in forming something that I felt would make a bigger difference – and that I would like to be part of a way of working that was about equality. I was a feminist, that really mattered to me. That kind of equality, feminism, and a different approach really. So I think that they asked questions about that and probably asked me some questions about my interest in whole foods, which I had and I've always been interested in where food is grown. I was already a vegetarian and I mentioned to you that I became a vegan whilst working in the shop. In part, because we didn't sell, when we set up, and we never did, we didn't sell dairy. So it was easy to be a vegan. Well, not easy, but it was easy to be vegetarian in Sheffield, as you will remember, because of the lovely Indian food, in particular, at that time and being a vegan just seemed a logical next step really to being a vegetarian. The downside of that for me, was that I put on weight, because with that delicious peanut butter (we had every kind that you could imagine) of beans, we always cooked something in the shop for lunch and ate it out the back. So, I'm sure they did ask me, and certainly we asked when we, once I'd been accepted, got through the interview, I know when we met Sally, when she applied, she brought a

particular interest and a more political perspective and passion for where food came from, and I learnt a lot from her. So I'd studied communications, I'd studied psychology, and we worked part-time in the shop when it came to it, so there were lots of the things that are now common practice, or things that people would like to have in their work. We had that sort of rotating jobs so that you felt part ownership of that whole, not only rotating jobs, we actually rotated shops, so I'll tell you about that in a bit.

[00:17:12]

*Mm.*

My particular - I was going to say something else- but my particular interest was in people, and in addition to being very interested in how we worked and the way in which we worked - the people side, the kind of, what I would now, as a leadership consultant, think of as the kind of culture that we co-created. I was very interested in that, very interested in the conversations that we had, and our differences, but at the same time, through the house where I'd lived with people who worked at Brick Rabbit, the restaurant and others, who were training to be doctors, in the same house - it was a big house- it was called the Rabbit House! I was very fortunate to live there actually 'cause they were great cooks, as you can imagine, and the other thing I was very fortunate about was that the medics - the core study that they were doing at Sheffield University - opened up an opportunity to join the course, because they were forming a new module on Child Psychology and Child Psychotherapy and they didn't have the numbers to make it viable. So, one of the people I lived with, who went on to become a medic, as did they both, invited me to join the course and it was very, very formative. So, in addition to working in the shop, I was also working under supervision and attending a course on child psychology and child psychotherapy at the University, and actually being supervised and in practice as a child, and a trainee, whilst I was working at the shop, so I had these two things.

*Two very different, things, or..?*

Different and similar, because I realised very early on that what I was interested in was working with people and the way in which people worked, and I liked that we set up a business; a viable business as a cooperative. That meant a lot to me, was exciting to me, to be part of co-creating something in which people had equal voice, in which people could really work together in a different way, where there wasn't a hierarchy. So it very much fitted with

the time, as well, you know. It was a very particular time, and I felt very privileged to be part of setting something up that I really believed in, as well.

[00:20:39]

*Could you go into a bit more detail actually, about how you set the co-op up once all the members had been interviewed and were in place?*

Yes. That is a good question, because I think that in order for us to be fully formed, and if you do get to speak to Richard, he will fill in the missing gaps, hopefully. We did need maybe, seven of us...

*Oh, ok*

...you might know, or certainly six of us, and I think we put a one pound share in, which sounds nothing now, but then was kind of more. So we interviewed for a sixth person, I think that's right...and because, although Chris was part of the interviewing, he wasn't part, he never became part of the shop. I think he was part of our formation, and we interviewed Jem, who, as I say, was called Gup in those days. And I think that I introduced Gup, to be interviewed – I'm not entirely sure. I think so. Anyway. He got through the interview, we liked him and I remember him. He had, he was one of us who got together for the reunion, and in those days he had very, very, very long hair in a ponytail, which was very striking, and again, of its time, very much of its time. So we formed in that way, and then I think between us, we found the premises. Maybe already, Richard who as I say was Dick, at the time, was probably very much with Phil on the front foot about this, and this little shop front, in this very nice area. Well worth your visiting if and when you go back to Sheffield – partly because it's still there – although its not a cooperative. And I was quite sad to hear it wasn't a cooperative any more. I think even it has changed name. Yeah. Whereas we did choose the name Down to Earth. So that would have been one of our first conversations. And I so remember us having it, even we might have painted it- I don't know who painted it. But we made the sign and we painted the front of the shop and it was very much like your corner shop in as much as people could put up notices. And so the door into the shop, always had, you know, adverts or people had lost their cat or whatever, you know, it was a real kind of notice board door into the shop. And I remember that it was painted a bright yellow colour.

And we had all the herbs in jars behind us, and the spices. And we had, we had tubs of stuff out the back, but then we had, we were always having debates about how best and what best to have bulk food in, that could then be scooped? Did we serve, or did people serve themselves in what was a very small space?

*And did any of you have any previous experience of running a shop or a business or were you all quite new to this?*

It's a really interesting question because Richard's mother and father did run a business – they ran a furniture business and he was not part of that business but had been around it. He was interested in drama and actually, he left Down to Earth to go and study drama, so having got his degree he then went, you know that, I think that we probably the five or six of us stayed together and then Richard left to do drama, I left to go and live on a commune as an extension of the way of working, I wanted to experiment with, experience part of living differently. So, I went to live on a commune called Lifespan up on the top of the Pennines, and Sally went to live in Columbia and Phil, I think, having done the degree in Communication Studies like me, he went on to something else. And so, for a while, it was Jem, Hugo and some other people.

*And when new people were brought in, were they brought in as members as well? So they kind of replaced people that were leaving?*

I think definitely so, yeah. Hugo definitely and obviously once I'd left I don't know, but certainly while we were all there anybody who came in became a member. And I think, the other important thing that happened, and I found a newspaper article about this, which you might be interested in about the formation of Suma, and what I mentioned earlier, we not only rotated jobs in the wholefood co-op, which was actually quite difficult for me, but very easy for Richard to do; I remember him being very good at doing the books, and that was something which I had, I think I resisted, because my father was also in business, but as a chartered accountant, and a bit like Richard didn't want to go near the furniture business at the time, I absolutely did not want to become, I had a bit of a reaction to, accounting, but I learnt a lot through doing it. And obviously I run my own business now, so it stood me in good stead. As did the flexible working, so I loved working in the shop and I loved studying alongside and actually doing a job with the NHS as well. It was a very, you know, in terms of life-work balance, the kind of things that people speak a lot about. Certainly to each other and in the work I do now. I recognise that we had something, you know, the kernel of something

which really worked, and we did have equal membership. What became an opportunity was all the others<sup>1</sup>; there was a shop in Leeds, there was a shop in York, and a shop in Todmorden and obviously our shop in Sheffield. What wasn't viable was each of the shops getting their bulk, driving down to London and driving back from London, with it. So, together with the other shops, we formed another cooperative called The Northern Wholefoods Company, with the sole purpose of becoming a distribution company. So there, through it, the formation of this and each of the shops contributing to it, we would buy a van, a Northern Wholefoods van, which would then go down to London and bring the stuff back to a central warehouse. As far as I know, I mentioned to you when we came into the room and saw the folder with Halifax on, I was born there but brought up in Elland, and I think that Northern Wholefoods, that for a long time, now called Suma, is based in Elland, which is really interesting for me, considering that was where I was brought up.

[00:30:18]

*And did you have, so what was your kind of awareness, the, apart from that network then, of the wider worker coop community in that area or in the UK?*

I don't think I had very much awareness of it. I think that I appreciated the existence of it, and in particular Northern Wholefoods, so, again, my interest and passion was how we behaved at these meetings when all of these people from the different shops came together. We sat in a big circle on the floor somewhere in Leeds, it's probably where the warehouse was, this is all from memory Philippa. So, as my memory of being in this big room and probably in the warehouse, quite dark; How good were we at really listening to each other asking questions? Creating a space to think? These were the kind of things. So, I was interested in that really, in how could we make sure that everybody had a voice and that we worked cooperatively. It was one thing have to be a co-operative but I was excited by the working cooperatively and our differences. This was definitely facilitated by going and doing job swaps, again fantastic ideas. So, for example, I did a job swap with somebody in York, which is where I'd actually been to school for five years, and Richard and my friendship grew, when I accompanied him and his dog. We hitched from Sheffield down to Brighton where his parents lived and ran their furniture business from. Me, Richard and his dog, hitched down to Brighton and I stayed with his parents, we, stayed with his parents whilst he worked in the Brighton shop, which of course as you may know still exists, Infinity Foods,

---

<sup>1</sup> (shops)

and they were the people that were there at the time doing really interesting things as well, and they were a cooperative. So I was aware, because I was only really aware of wholefood cooperatives, I wasn't aware of other cooperatives in other sectors, I wasn't at all, and it made sense to me, you know. Absolutely. Yeah.

[00:33:38]

*And how easy, did you think kind of democratic decision making was, both in that wider network and also within the smaller shop?*

I don't think it is easy and, it was easier in the small shop. The five of us, so Richard, Me, Sally, Jem and Phil, and indeed when Hugo joined. The six of us. It was easy, I think we complimented each other and we really worked together. We had different strengths; for example Gup<sup>2</sup> was brilliant serving people. He was just, the perfect storekeeper, shopkeeper. And Phil was very good as well. Phil I think, had been brought up in Sheffield, like me, from Yorkshire. He had a very nice manner, as did everybody, with customers. I think I was ok, at being a shopkeeper. I think I, I was interested in. I think, Sally brought the whole political perspective around where things came from, which was fantastic. And I brought more, I think we all brought it, but I think I was more, aware of the impact on the community, so of like, all the notices on the door, of people coming in and trying food that they'd never tried before, being encouraged to eat different things. And, yeah. So it was easy in the small, I would say. My experience of working cooperatively in Northern Wholefoods - I don't remember enjoying that especially. I think that was probably quite difficult for me. But that could have been because I lacked confidence and probably wasn't given space. And that might have been something to do with my being a woman? I would say my memory is that, you know, I might have been in a minority as well. I think there were less women in Northern Wholefoods than men, partly because we all did do everything and I lugged huge sacks of rice, huge sacks of flour, you know? It was heavy work, and I think it was probably more difficult for somebody like me. Sally was very articulate - very, very articulate and I think - and hope - I don't remember - hope she had voice. She was from Sheffield as well, and that's how she'd, she'd come back from university and was looking, I think, to be around in Sheffield for a bit, and so that's how she'd found us. You know?

[00:37:20]

---

<sup>2</sup> Jem (note from Anni Townsend)

*And did it seem like there was a move within the kind of worker co-op that you were involved in, towards gender equality and links with feminism?*

I think I was the move. I think I felt, and along with Sally I think, again, we brought that. But, I think I was definitely brought that perspective and also the matriarchal one. So I was part of a matriarchal group, so we were studying together, you know? A different way of being for women and female archetype and what have you, alongside a kind of feminist philosophy. So, that was important. And we'd all lived with other people as students, so not with each other but had lived with other people and, I say it all, I'm not entirely sure that we all had lived with other people, but we were used to that kind of sharing. I think, in the bigger group, it was still very difficult for women's voices to be heard. Or, for mine to be heard anyway, I think. But that might have been more to do with me, not quite yet having established myself as a woman, let alone as a feminist.

[00:38:52]

*And did you find you had any links with wider cooperative development agencies; so, ICOM/ or kind of, ICOM women's link up?*

Yes we did, ICOM definitely. And again, let me check – it would just be so fantastic [if Richard could be here]... we so did, that rings such a big bell. Um, let me see if, [checks phone] oh! He's going to be here at 12.30 so he can fill in the missing gaps! I'm putting "sooner the better, you can fill in the missing gaps!" So do make a note of the things because Richard would be able to tell you about the more uh, things like ICOM. I absolutely remember ICOM, both from, I'm sure, not only the perspective of, I'm sure we registered with ICOM, we would have had to. And I remember it not only from the shop, but also from Northern Wholefoods, and, from Lifespan, because Lifespan, went through a transformation and I was one of the, it had existed for ages, and to this day I have no idea how I come to be one of the founder members of Lifespan because I was definitely not one of the first there, but something must have happened around registration and I happened to be living there at the time and I lived there for just over a year, and so, your question about how easy, or how, how well, had the cooperative movement embraced feminism, I wrote that there was a, I hope somebody has kept it, because that'd be an amazing archive. There was a book, that we were encouraged, not to keep our own personal journeys at Lifespan, but to have a collective journal where anybody could write everything, anything they wanted to. And I can remember meeting somebody and them saying "you're not Anni Townend from Lifespan are you?" And

I said yes, and they said “Oh we visited a few years ago and we read the journal, you know, the Lifespan journal” and it’s what I remembered. And I can remember again, I was on my own at the time. I wasn’t in a relationship and it was quite difficult being a woman, particularly at Lifespan, on top of the Pennines, very exposed, very wild, very lovely, very hard in old railways workers’ cottages. Where, when I moved there, there was still, one of the railways workers wives still in one of the cottages. And there were definitely more men than women there, I so do remember that. And I became much more aware through that, and I’m sure Lifespan would have had to have been registered with ICOM, of being part of the, of a movement and events were held and we went to them at different communes. We regularly went to Laurieston Hall which still exists, though I’m not sure that it exists in the same way, but that was definitely a focal point, where people from different communes got together as well. And it was an extension of, for me, it was an extension of working cooperatively to experience living cooperative...living communally, but living cooperatively. And I know that I railed against traditional roles,, you know? I think we worked hard in the commune at trying to, yeah, trying to bring about change between us. I did meet other feminists through the cooperative commune movement. I met, you know, separatists, and at the same time I was by then training as a therapist, so I’d moved away from child psychotherapy but had trained as a therapist, and I was doing that in Sheffield in co-counselling and again you’ll notice that the co- piece of that. So, it is for me the commune, the cooperative community, co-counselling, in the same way that I readily joined Down to Earth and wanted to be part of its formation and was committed to Lifespan. I think my experience of working or training, one I was a bit too young to become a child psychotherapist, but I was definitely part of a movement that was questioning hierarchy and was questioning, questioning that, and very influenced in the therapy work by Carl Rogers, person centered by John Heron on co-counselling and the equality of relationships, so it ran through absolutely everything. So I felt part of an even bigger movement. I didn’t personally feel like I was part of a cooperative movement, I felt like I was part of an even bigger movement; a whole way of living and working based on shared...and, so you know, in the commune we had shared childcare, none of us in the shop had children, so that wasn’t something that we did, but you know, there was an expectation that I would bring money in, so I learnt how to fit wood stoves and I would do stuff in the kitchen, and help look after other people’s children. And I was quite lonely in the commune actually. I’m really glad I had a go. But I was very aware of the contradictions. You know, again I had paid in a pound, and, a few years ago I was contacted because there was some complicated legal case going on, and I was literally on the periphery but I had to be

informed, and I, that's as much as I know. And then last September, so if you ever do something on the whole commune movement, I bumped into somebody at a conference where I was speaking, who I recognised and who had lived in the railway worker's cottages. There was a bottom row and a top row. I lived in the bottom row, he lived in the top row that was slowly being built; the bottom row was more formed. And we'd not seen each other since that time and he was at this conference and I recognised him immediately and so there's something about the quality of relationships from that time; this working things out in personal relationships and work relationships. And in having different kind of, relationships with each other. So not necessarily being monogamous, not, you know, having the traditional nuclear family set up. It was a real part of, I think, really trying to sort of find out an alternative way of working that would support people working differently. Yeah.

[00:47:53]

*So you left Down to Earth when you went to join Lifespan?*

Well I think, as Richard, Sally went to Columbia, Richard went to London, back to London. Jem stayed on. Phil, I think through his course moved on, but probably stayed on longer. But, it was a time of change and I think I wanted to keep on pushing the edges out. I wanted to find, if it was possible, to live and work in a different way. It was fraught with contradictions, you know. In terms of what we've already touched on and I suppose I was still forming and finding my own feet in the world but I was aware of the contradictions of, you know, the kind of people who were drawn to live in the commune. I began a relationship with somebody who was from a very different background to me, a man, who I met through the communes network, and that highlighted to me that many people who lived in the communes had, like myself, to a certain extent, come from comfortable backgrounds, middle class backgrounds, and that we were, I felt I was, exactly as I'd described it – this was a choice I was *able* to make; whereas when I met my partner of several years, Colin, he had come from a very working class background and I learnt a lot from him about the contradictions, almost, of that. I do remember my mother never visited in the commune, but my father did visit me on one occasion and I think they were very puzzled by it, you know, why I would want to live in this way, in such a different way from how I was brought up.

[00:50:40]

*And kind of touching on your experience then, after this, so in your career or even in your life after this, how do you feel your experience in the worker coop and the commune, how do you*

*feel the values you could have picked up there carried on through the rest of your career or life?*

Well they have Philippa, they have. Because, I, as I mentioned to you, I am a leadership consultant and executive coach, I'm passionate about people; I'm really curious in people, I'm curious in organisational culture, which, I believe, is about people and especially about leadership, creating that kind of culture. And my own values, are around kindness and openness and transparency and generosity. Which leads me to kind of, having, what I call, courageous conversations. And, I think that, in terms of Down to Earth and Lifespan, that was a good grounding in having courageous conversations - in being brave, and bold and questioning, you know? So, like I said as we were walking up the street, you know, usually it's me asking the questions; encouraging people maybe to consider a different perspective, or, think about something differently. Or asking different questions. So I think that was what I was doing then. I think, then, you know, I, I trained in co-counselling and became a co-counsellor and a facilitator of co-counselling, and then, wanted to get another kind of qualification in psychology and looked at different things, including a course in Bradford in business psychology an MBA later on.<sup>3</sup> But at that time I was still looking for a way of working with people that was grounded in equality, and really, believing in people and knowing what was best for them but sometimes needing someone to help us find out what that is. Because I felt that I'd been helped to that through therapy, through co-counselling, through the women's group I was in, through the matriarchy group I was in, through living with people, and, so I studied in Leeds a diploma in humanistic psychology. And, again, the humanistic approach fitted so well with the cooperative, approach and again it was about community, so it was a two-year programme part-time, every week, but part-time. And it was very much about being a community of learners, so that kind of learning from each other. So, this thread has run through. And I think the fact that I know work with senior teams, teams of leaders and help them, irrespective of their role or their status, have courageous conversations of working together more effectively through building bigger relationships with each other, and that's certainly, what – and, as I say, I'll show you the photograph if I can find it – the five of us, who, have really stuck together and know where each other are and are in touch with each other. We did build a big relationship, and as did the people who were at Infinity. And I know that they, some of them, formed the brand you will have heard of called Ecover.

*Oh yes.*

---

<sup>3</sup> Note from AT - I did do an MA at Lancaster University later on in Management Learning.

You know?

*Yes*

So you know, it excites me. And living here actually I realised that there are, you know, a generation of people, probably like yourself, who are also but of this time, interested in, and that 's partly why I wanted to contribute and that is partly why I wanted to contribute because there is a thread running through of people who are asking questions and are of a history, and oral history like this that is different from the history that I did at school, and that didn't always recognise me or the everyday experience of people and their lives. And, that I am very interested in. People's stories and I shared with you, I've been working on my website and becoming more open about my story, and I'm always excited when I hear about organisations today – there's a place in Devon, I think, Riverford Organics, and they have just become a cooperative and everybody has a share in the company, or what have you, and that excites me. And that kind of a generosity that potentially cooperatives can, can offer, I think, through people having that kind of mindset.

*Those are all the kind of specific questions I have to I have to ask...*

That you have to ask, hahaha!

*Yeah that I had pre planned to ask! But if you have anything else that I haven't covered or that you want to go through?*

Well I will send you - I've got two articles, one about the formation, I think, of Suma and the other an article that Richard and I wrote – as a kind of spoof article, there used to being the Independent On Sunday years ago, a page entitled "How we met" and Richard and I did, you know, a kind of mock-up of this for when we got married and I'll send you that because that also has how we met, really met, through Down to Earth, through the formation of Down to Earth.

*That's great, thank you very much, I'll turn the recorder off now.*