

<p>Working Together: recording and preserving the heritage of the workers' co-operative movement</p>
<p>Ref no:</p>
<p>Name: Clare Sudbery</p> <p>Worker Co-ops: Billie's (restaurant, and all female co-operative Manchester), Basta Pasta</p>
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<p>Interviewer's comments: Some parts of this interview have been redacted due to inclusion of personal data.</p>

Summary:

[02:02] Clare Sudbery discusses getting involved in Billie's (restaurant in Manchester).

[00:15:43] Talks about experience working in Billie's. **[00:22:38]** Talks about leaving Billie's and moving to Basta Pasta (Italian restaurant in Manchester). **[00:24:06]** Discusses Basta Pasta.

[00:27:00] Talks about the worker co-op scene and political scene in Manchester in the late 80s/early 90s, includes discussion of: Clause 28, Abdullah Ibrahim and the Criminal Justice Bill.

[37:49] Discusses work after Basta Pasta in particular working in the tech industry (Thoughtworks). **[41:45]** Talks about how co-operative working is mirrored in the tech industry in particular in Agile working.

Transcript:

Clare: Yeah there was a local MP involved or was she a councillor? Councillor, Margaret Manning, she was really involved with Frontline, she was on the, kind of organis, they had like a sort of a, a board or an organising committee or something, she was on it and a guy called Neil who was, also a local politician, I can't remember any more than that.

Interviewer: It's interesting how everyone is kind of, connected within it like, and a lot of people you know when you start talking to someone there like 'Oh I know this person and this person that did' so,

Yeah, yeah well I mean I also, vaguely knew people at places like 8th day and, Unicorn, which you might of heard about if, is 8th day still going?

They are still going, they're on Oxford Road, and yeah they've actually got, there kind of one of the places that has a collection of stuff and luckily one of my volunteers, her partner works there, and he, because I hadn't really had any contact with them, and he managed to kind of use his in, to like be like 'oh we've got this stuff here do you want to donate it to the archive' so yeah its pretty good

So 8th day, are they still a workers' co-op?

Mmm [agreement]

And Unicorn are they still a workers' co-op?

Yeah, yeah.

So Unicorn used to provide a lot of the food that we used in our restaurant because we were

vegetarian restaurant so,

So you got all the food from there?

Yeah

Because they're, are they fully vegan, or are they just vegetarian?

I don't know. But they, I know that they, they definitely care about all of that stuff, and then, then and then remembered that, the woman who used to live downstairs from me was involved with a print co- op, that I think might of been all female I think it was a women's printing co-op, but I can't remember what it was called.

It wasn't Amazon Press was it?

I don't think so, but I'll try and find out, yeah, because, I could put you in touch with her as well, oh, I was right so [ph] Ally reckons it was about 2001/2002, that he was at Frontline. And I also used to work at a place called Basta Pasta which was another co-op.

[00:02:02]

So yeah in terms of, your involvement, could you kind of go into a bit of detail about that?

Yeah, so I mean it's actually rather a nice little story I think, I mean just from my own personal history, because I, left home when I was 18 and I moved to Manchester and I actually I had a place at university, but I had decided that I didn't want to just go straight A-levels, university and just sort of, be part of the kind of conveyor belt of, education, I kind of wanted to do something else and I decided to have a year out, and most people when they had a year out would like go travelling the world but I thought no that was too much of a cliché [laughing], 'I want to come and live in Manchester, and experience real life' [laughing], so I came from York I moved to Manchester and I didn't at that point know whether I would be going to university in Manchester

or Birmingham, so you could do this thing where you just applied deferred entry so you would get a place, but you would apply for the following year instead of the current year, so I knew at that point because I hadn't had my A-level results yet, so I didn't know whether I was going to Manchester or Birmingham University, but I knew I might be going to Manchester and I had a friend who was moving here, so we, she was a lot older than me and she bought a house, so originally I kind of briefly lived with her and she was living in Chorlton, and, I it was all terribly exciting you know leaving home for the first time didn't have a job didn't know what I was going to do, and almost, I think the day I arrived, my friend's boyfriend so the friend that I was living with, her boyfriend showed me a copy of the local newspaper probably the Manchester Evening News, and there was a job advert in there, they were looking for somebody to work at this restaurant, and the restaurant was Billie's, and it was a, a, it was a workers co-op, it was also vegetarian it was also all female, and I was particularly interested in that because, I, one of the reasons I came to Manchester was for the gay scene, because I was a lesbian, and I thought, if it's an all female co-op chances are there'll be some lesbians in there and actually it was almost an all lesbian co-op [laughing], there was like one straight woman, and, and, so my, my, friends boyfriend showed me this advert, you know this kind of all female vegetarian workers' co-op restaurant, and he was like 'you should apply for that' and was like 'yeah! That's a good idea' and there was a phone number you had to ring and I rang up and this woman called Lisa answered and I can't remember her surname but she was one of the, original co-op members, and she had this Liverpool accent and for some reason I really liked a Liverpool accent, and, and it was actually her that, they invited me for an interview I don't even think I filled a form in I might have done, but it was all quite informal, very quickly I was invited in for an interview and they were in Chorlton and I was living in Chorlton so it was all very handy, and I remember, they had like this, upstairs room, so it was, the premises is still there it's still a restaurant but it's now, two premises have been knocked together, I can't remember the name of it but it's a bar/restaurant, mostly a bar actually, it's opposite Chorlton baths, and, so it was like kind of a tall thin, premises you know typical row of shops basically, restaurants and shops, the downstairs was the restaurant and then there was these, kind of really narrow steps because it's like one of those old, Victorian buildings, so kind of these narrow I remember like the narrow steps going upstairs and then there was like a, all the food storage so they had this one room, that was just full of supplies, a lot of dried stuff and because it was a vegetarian restaurant

lots of kind of pulses, lots of spices, loads of spices I remember the smell, of that room, and then there was like another room at the front of the building which was like their office, it was all a bit shambolic, you know it was kind of ancient, falling apart furniture, paper on every surface it didn't look very organised, and when she interviewed me we were both sat in these kind of, mismatched second hand armchairs with the stuffing kind of falling out [laughing], and, I remember just being sort of enchanted by it, you know this sort of just the feel of it, it just had this lovely atmosphere, it was a small group of women, there was really not very many of us, so I was full time, there were maybe 6 of us working full time? I wasn't, a full member of the co-op, I can't remember exactly how that worked, I think I was technically an employee rather than rather than a member of the co-op, I remember there being something about if you paid a pound then you were a member, but I, I'm confusing Billie's which was this restaurant and Basta Pasta, and I think maybe technically, I don't, I just can't remember maybe I did pay the pound but I still for some reason didn't have quite the same status that the others did, I'm just not sure about that, but they definitely had a different status, it wasn't like a massively hierarchical thing, but they were, they had a slightly different status to me I was, really just an employee. And they all seemed very old and wise, I was 18, they were all in their 20's I think, you know, actually nobody was very old, maybe the oldest was 30, you know [laughing] but, but I was only 18 so you know, even a couple of years at that age, seems like a lot, they seemed like they were really sorted and they knew what they were doing, and, they had this, goal, and I couldn't even tell you what the goal was actually, I mean it was a bit of an odd idea, the restaurant itself, was supposedly, nouvelle cuisine, so it was vegetarian nouvelle cuisine, so on the one hand you had 8th day, which was like, proper old fashioned vegetarian food i.e. you know, lots of beans, baked potatoes, very sort of hearty and wholesome and you know, a big plate of vegetarian food, whereas Billie's, it was all much more refined, you know and you'd kind of you know things would be artfully arranged on the plate and you'd have quite small portions and it was all quite fancy, and I think that actually, that just wasn't really, a great idea, I think, if people want vegetarian food they probably did just want, the kind of, the sort of, the stuff that the 8th day was serving, if they were going to go a posh night out to a restaurant, they didn't necessarily want vegetarian food, so there was some appetite, but we, were never well almost never full, and they were already struggling, when I joined them, because it was a bit of odd idea I think, we had things like...I dunno why I particularly remember this, we served elderflower wine, and I really liked it! It was, it was made

by a, a company called Rocks I think, Rocks Elderflower Wine, it was actually alcoholic because you can, you can elderflower cordial now, but it was actually wine, and my dad used to make elderflower wine as well that's probably why I liked it so much because it kind of reminded me of my dad because

we had elderflower bushes in the garden. And we did you know we did, the food was delicious, so I did both, I was a waiter and a cook, so I used to, I think it was just kind of random really and just whatever, people used to sort of take it in turns, and, I used to love it because I got to make my own apple pie, because that was the one thing really, I wasn't much of a cook to be honest but I could cook, I learned to cook, my mum had taught me to cook, and the one thing that I was proudest of that I could cook was an apple pie, because I can make my own pastry, and, and that's been sort of passed down through generations, my mum makes apple pie with her own pastry, my grandma did too, and there's sort of this you know, thing in our family that, that all the women are really good at making pastry so I was like, I was proud of my apple pie, so I, I, I managed to persuade them to let me make apple pie so I used to quite often make an apple pie, for , for pudding, for the guests. And the other thing that I remember was, this was Lisa's one, so Lisa was the woman who interviewed me, and she had actually, been to catering college and, was quite a kind of accomplished chef, she kind of knew what she was doing [laughing], and she used to make this thing called hot mushrooms, which was little button mushrooms, cooked in, wine, cream and garlic, so it was it this wonderful sauce, of wine, cr[eam] it was a starter so

you'd get it in a little ramekin, so it'd be these button mushrooms in this amazing sauce, and it was, that, that was lovely, that was one of my favourites. And we were allowed to eat the food because at Basta Pasta we weren't so much, but at Billie's we pretty much were allowed in fact I lived on food like, so when I left home I wasn't a vegetarian, and I applied for this job, and it did actually say, you have to be a vegetarian, and they were allowed to specify that you were a vegetarian and they were also allowed to specify that you were a woman, and even though normally, discrimination, legislation would say you can't do that that would actually count as sexism, there's something about the size of a workforce, if you're workforce was, I don't know if it's still true but if your workforce was below a certain size, then a lot of the legislation didn't apply to you you could kind of do what you like [laughing], so they were small enough to get away with it, to specify that they were all female, and all vegetarian so it did say in the job advert you have to be a vegetarian, and I wasn't, but I thought, but I can be, I don't mind being [laughing] like, if, if it means I get a job that's alright I'll be a vegetarian [laughing]

[00:11:22]

And did they ask you that at the interview?

I mean I guess so, I don't honestly remember, but I did become a vegetarian because, bas[ically], I mean I didn't, the pay, was horrendous really, it was £60 a week, for a 40 hour week, so it was £1.50 an hour, and it yeah, it was 30 years ago, so and it was, exactly 30 years ago, because I, started in 1987, and I finished in 1988, so I actually started 31 years ago, and finished about 30 years ago, so you know ok, inflation, £60 £1.50 an hour wasn't as bad then as it would be now but it wasn't a lot, it was, it was right at the low end of what you might be able to earn in a job, but because I was only 18, and I was only living in my friend's spare room, so I didn't have massive costs obviously I didn't have any dependents, I didn't mind living frugally, I didn't ex[pect] I wasn't used to the high life or anything, I didn't expect, anything, I was quite happy to cycle everywhere, and to just, you know and most of the food that I ate came from the restaurant, I mostly survived on leftovers, so it wasn't difficult to be a vegetarian, because my main source of food, was this vegetarian restaurant, so I was like 'yeah whatever' [laughing]

[00:12:34]

And did she, was she, woman that was trained as a caterer did she kind of teach everyone else cooking, or was it more just kind of you went as you go?

I think it we were very much, I think they had varying levels of experience between them I think she definitely had a big influence there was at least one other woman there who also, you know actually was trained, in, stuff to do with food [laughing] I don't know exactly what, but between them, they were quite savvy, you know they knew enough about food to be able to put a menu together and, and, and cook, you know and it was, it was good food, it was, it was well cooked, and, the other thing that I remember about Lisa was that she had this thing about chilli's, she had taught herself, she, purely to be hard, I mean it was a kind of a, image thing, it was a bravado thing, she had, gradually increased her tolerance to chilli's, so that she would, could eat the hottest chilli's, raw, and she used to actually, she used to get raw chilli's and put them in a blender to make this kind of, raw chilli paste and then just eat it with a spoon [laughing]...it was like 'look at me, look how hard I am' [laughing]... but, it was I mean it, it was, it was, I remember the hot mushrooms and I remember the apple pie I remember a thing oh yeah oh I'd forgotten about this, I made again a few years ago, a thing called spinach plait I think, and it was puff pastry, it was actually Jus roll, so we didn't make the puff pastry it did actually come in rolls from, from, from the shop which was a bit cheaty but anyway, and then you could there was a way of cutting it, and you could sort of fold it, you'd cut it in strips and then fold it over so it'd make this kind of plait effect and the filling, was, spinach and more I think, actually mushrooms, wine and garlic again [laughing] and, spinach and maybe a few other ingredients, but that was really nice as well I used to love that [laughing]

It's made me hungry now

Yeah! [00:14:4]

And did you, because you said you got some of the ingredients from Unicorn, was that set up just because it was close by or because it was a worker co-op or a bit of both?

You know what, I think I might have got that wrong I think it was Suma, have you heard of Suma? Yeah, yeah Because they were a co-op as well weren't they? And I think, the connection, I think they were also in Chorlton though I dunno if there was a connection between Suma and Unicorn or if they were just close just physically close, but in my head there's a connection that's why I got them mixed up, maybe Suma also supplied Unicorn, maybe that's the connection, but yeah, I think it was S.U.M.A have you heard of them?

Yeah I went up to visit them a few weeks ago?

Are they still going as well?

Yeah they're up, near Halifax

Oh, so maybe they were never in Chorlton maybe that's just me getting confused

Yeah, I've not heard of them [that] but I know that they, I'm pretty certain they supplied Unicorn at some point so

That's probably the connection, yeah, no I think most, most of the, well all the dry ingredients and the kind of the pulses and that kind of thing, all came from Suma, yeah, because they, they had their name plastered all over everything they might even have supplied, oh no it was Rocks elderflower wine wasn't it? Yeah, it's 30 years ago [laughing], but, yeah, no that's definitely right.

[00:15:43]

And did you kind of, so you were an employee but did you kind of notice any particular, worker co-op, I guess structures going on there in terms of meetings, or decision making, or,

Yeah, they did have meetings and I didn't get invited to them so again that reinforces the idea that there was some kind of separation. I do remember, thinking, that, because they did, they fell out with each other, you know not, not loads but they would have arguments and they

would have disagreements about, the way forward, particularly when, you know they were struggling so they did actually go bust while I was working there, so the reason I stopped working there was because they closed, so obviously that puts pressure on you, but, think, you know things would sometimes get a bit nasty, and people would be kind of slagging each other of but it wasn't actually that bad, but, you know it happened, and I remember thinking, that I, you know I was quite cynical about it, I thought you can't, create a utopia, when the rest of society isn't a utopia I remember thinking that, so there's a political idea about you can't have socialism in one country, because other countries will actually, put pressure on, and make it really hard for one country to survive, I remember thinking it's a very similar idea that, it's all very well saying, 'that we're trying to sit outside capitalism', but you're not outside capitalism because everybody's, you've still got money, and you've still got to survive, and people have still got mortgages and, actually, you might have a little oasis of utopia inside your organisation but you can't ignore, the rest of the world so for instance you have to make money, and that, the pressure of money is the obvious one, that's gonna put pressure on you and when even if you're all really lovely people and you have a really lovely ethos, when pressure's put to bear on you, you're gonna start, falling out with each other and not being quite so nice, it wasn't awful, you know, honestly I don't actually remember, any, individual, arguments, or instances I just remember that generally towards the end, people were beginning to fall out, and the kind of the pressure and it was like, and I started to get a bit cynical and think, you can't create, utopia on an island it just like, unfortunately the real world is always going to kind of, come in, but, but having said that, I'm sure, if I'd of worked in, other kind of, I mean generally catering is a pretty brutal industry actually, and generally when you hear about working conditions hours and pay and all the rest of it for people in the catering industry it's always been the case, of people don't get treated well, and they don't necessarily have particularly nice experiences, whereas actually, I did, love, working there, and I, even though technically, I was an employee, and I didn't have quite the same status as the other women, it was never, an issue, you know, I never felt like I was treated badly, or, or you know they didn't show me respect in fact if you think about it I was just an 18 year old girl who'd just left home, they didn't have any reason to particularly show me any respect [laughing] but they did, you know they treated me really well, and, we, we were, it was had that family feel, so, you know because I was only 18 and I didn't have any other responsibilities, my life basically consisted of, going to Billie's so we'd do a 10 hour shift that would start, I think it was 10 till 10 no it was 12 till 12 I think you start at midday you finish at midnight, I think that's what it, no that would be 12 hours, well anyway, it was definitely a

10 hour shift, and we did 10 to finish something like 11 or 12 at night, and then what we would do, sorry it's detail, I think it was probably midday till 10 at night I think that's what it was I think probably the restaurant shut between about 9 and 10 and we would get out soon after 10, and then we'd go clubbing, so you know, it felt like every night we went clubbing I mean I'm not, quite sure how we would of managed that, I mean certainly when you're 18 and you don't have to start work till midday the following day you can probably cope with the hangovers, but I'm just thinking, how did I afford it? But I know that there were, there were clubs on the gay scene that were really cheap to get in to, particularly mid-week, I think there were clubs that were free to get into mid- week, and then, the drinks were really cheap as well, I mean, I'm sure you used to be able to get a pint for a pound, in some places, so actually, and I probably didn't actually drink very much in fact, I've never been a big drinker, so probably it was mostly about the atmosphere, and we definitely did used to go clubbing a lot [laughing]

Was that in central Manchester or round?

Yeah, there was, there were, there was some clubs in particular that I remember so there was one called Stuffed Olives, there was one called the Number One Club, Stuffed Olives was pretty much, exclusively a lesbian club I think, Number One Club was a gay club but it very, the Number One Club became very popular, in the, late, 80s, so, about, a year or two after I stopped working at Billie's it became part of the acid scene, so they used to have acid nights on Friday night kind of acid house, and, it, it so it was still a gay club but it very much became part of the acid scene as well, and I so I carried on going to the Number One Club for, quite a long time and it was really cheap, it was definitely cheap so there was the Number One Club there was Stuffed Olives, and then there were places and neither of those were actually in the gay village, Number One Club was round the back of the Town Hall, and Stuffed Olives was on King Street so near the Royal Exchange, I think it might have been back King Street but it was near King Street, and then South King Street, that's what it was, and then, we used to go to places in the gay village so Thompson's which is still there, and I think it's still called Thompsons, it was called something else at one point but I can't remember what, those are the main o[nes] oooh! and then there was [Rock it] Follies, so there was there's a place called Rockies, and next door to it was a place called Follies it was quite funny because Rockies, was very much a gay male club, and it had this bit called the dungeon [laughing] which was like, I, you know, I, I think a lot of gay men didn't go in there certainly I don't think any women ever went down there I think it was quite hard core but, there was [laughing] Rockies,

and then next door to Rockies was Follies and that was much more of a lesbian place, so we used to go to Follies quite a lot but occasionally we'd go to Rockies as well, and they were both, just opposite Piccadilly Station, so there was those as well, so yeah there was loads, loads of stuff going on [laughing]

Nice social life after work

Yeah! It was fantastic! Honestly, it, it was a great way to leave home, it was a great experience you know, for my first full time, and it was, my first full time job, and it was, it was a lovely, kind of introduction to, independent living [laughing]

[00:22:38]

And why did it shut down in the end?

It was money. They, they, basically just couldn't, they had debts and they, they just couldn't, keep going, they they just couldn't afford to.

And where did you go on to, after that?

Ohh I had an admin job, so I went from there, to, I very briefly, worked as an admin assistant for a computer training place in Old Trafford and then I was an admin assistant at the tax office in Old Trafford just next to the cricket ground. But then, so that was, that took me to the end of my year off to when I started university, but when I started university, I was looking for a part time job, to keep me going, to help pay the rent, and just you know, give me a bit of spending money, and that was when, I discovered Basta Pasta, which I already knew about because one of the women that had worked with me at Billie's, Kate ¹ [REDACTED] I think I gave you her details, so Kate ² [REDACTED] had worked with me at Billie's and then she, I think she might of moved straight on from Billie's to Basta Pasta, but it was her who introduced me to Basta Pasta, and she got me work there so then we were both working at Basta Pasta and, I was, I

¹ Personal data

² Personal data

Yeah! And that must've been, that was probably when I left Billie's, I'm not sure, but it seems most likely that I was looking for another job, I liked the idea of working for a co-op I got used to working for a co- op and think that's almost certainly when I applied to work for 8th day, and there was, I was thinking about applying somewhere else some other co-op but I can't remember now, oh it might've been Frontline actually, but I didn't get the job, I ended up getting the admin assistant job and kind of just went off in that direction.

[00:27:00]

And you kind of spoke about the, worker co-op scene, could you say a bit more about that kind of in Manchester, what did that feel like?

Yes! There was very much a feeling that, that this thing existed, and I suppose I wasn't like intimately involved in it but you know, you were aware that, these people were connected, there was definitely this feeling that they were doing something good you know, that they were kind of trying to make the world a better place, trying to do something good, trying to not just you know, follow the path of capitalism and just be part of the system, try not to be part of the system, there was a lot of politics so, I, definitely I mean there was obviously well not obviously but there was, a very feminist slant, to Billie's you know I mean they, they, it was political decision to be, all female, and, you know they, they kind of didn't want men to be involved, and even though the other co-ops that I was aware of like Unicorn and 8th Day were, mixed gender, there was you were aware that there were a lot of kind of feminists and political activists, in all of it, and that there was definitely they were all connected and talking to each other, I knew about the 8th Day because I worked at Billie's and, you know I don't remember individuals but I must've been introduced to people from these other co-ops, I think they used to visit each other I mean it was definitely a feeling that, they were all part of something, that they were connected and I think they must've had, they must've had networks I mean I think they had deliberately support networks set up and they were kind of looking after each other, I don't remember details but I just remember the feeling, that it was a part of something bigger, definitely the political element, so in, the other thing that I didn't mention that was a really big part of me, being at, Billie's, which is how I know it was 30 years ago is, and how I found out about you, was because I met, the woman

who told me about you at an event at Manchester Library in February which was commemorating the 30th anniversary of a giant demo in Manchester against Clause 28, so Clause 28, was a Tory, piece of legislation that said that, they made it illegal, for people to 'promote', I'm doing air quotes [laughing] 'promote' homosexuality, in schools, or in any public body, so it was they were trying to make it illegal basically for teachers to talk about homosexuality to children and the concept of promote was really vague so basically they were saying that if you know if you have some kind of, social ed type class for teenagers where you even talk about the possibility of them being gay then that's promoting homosexuality, and it, it was based on complete bad science it's complete nonsense this idea that you might be able to, turn teenagers gay or you might be able to make people gay, by promoting homosexuality which is in itself complete nonsense, but the whole thing was obviously deeply homophobic and, nasty, so there was a giant, campaign against it, and there was a, giant demo in Albert Square, in Manchester, in February 1988, and they had there were 20 at least 20 000 people there it was really it was big national event and it was part of the you know there were demos in London as well but there was this whole big campaign against it, and all of us at Billie's were all involved in campaigning so that was the other thing if we weren't working or going clubbing we were on demos, so and we were all, you know, quite strongly involved, so I remember, for instance the office upstairs for quite a long time was full of posters and placards and, you know things to do with the campaign and that, that was an, and there was a really strong kind of political instinct and feeling, and I know the same was true of Frontline in particular, so Frontline was a radical left-wing bookshop that was actually explicitly its, its aim, and the, and there's like a, even Basta Pasta so I know I said that the two of them were maybe a little bit cynical and maybe weren't, wholly on board with the co-operative movement [laughing] in the way that other people were, they were political so, I've got there's a lovely, story that I remember from Basta Pasta, there was this, there is, he's still going, a musician called, Abdullah Ibrahim, who at the time used to be more commonly known as Dollar Brand but he's a jazz musician, and he, I was big fan of his I actually was introduced to him by my Dad who's a big jazz fan, and, and he came to play in Manchester so I was really excited I had you know, I knew about it, now did I, yeah so I, bought a ticket that's right because I knew that I liked him and I wanted to go so I went to this concert and the concert was in Manchester Cathedral, and, when, I arrived at the Cathedral, I was late, so I was in a big rush, and there was man, handing leaflets out against anti-apartheid, as people were going into the concert so he was handing out anti-apartheid leaflets so about South

Africa so this was obviously when apartheid was still a thing and Mandela was in prison and, and he was handing out these leaflets and [laughing] I was in a rush and I bumped into him and sent all of his leaflets flying, and they like went all over the floor and I was like really apologetic and helped him to pick them up and he was like 'it's ok, it's ok don't apologise everything's fine' and then I got into the Cathedral, sat down, concert started, guy comes on stage and its the, it is him [laughing], so the guy that I'd knocked over handing out leaflets was actually Abdullah Ibrahim, it was the man that I'd come to see [laughing] because normally I only ever, because I didn't used to kind of watch videos he probably wasn't even in music videos so, you would only ever hear, jazz musicians you didn't often see them so I didn't know what he looked like [laughing] and then he came on stage I was like 'Oh my god' [laughing] but the connection with the restaurant, is that the following day, when I went into work at Basta Pasta I mentioned that I'd been to this concert and Immy, who's one of the guys who ran the place said, 'you should've told me I had free tickets', and the reason he had free tickets was because Basta Pasta had anti-apartheid posters up, so that's how I know that actually Immy and Bob⁴ were quite political I think it was more Immy than Bob but Immy had put up these anti-apartheid posters all round the restaurant, and, Abdullah Ibrahim on his way to the concert, the night before had walked past the restaurant, seen the posters, been really happy and impressed, come in, given free tickets to Immy for the gig , and then! This is the following night, he, Immy had invited him, to come for a meal, so, they all came to the restaurant, for a meal, and I was working that night, and he recognised me as being the woman who'd just [laughing] sent all his flyers to the floor, and he, but he was really nice about it and he invited me to sit down and eat with them, and, and and you know introduced me to all these kind of musicians and PR people and all the people that he was with and I've still got his bill from that night that I got him to sign, [laughing] yeah, so that's like, and again that feeling of being part of a political community you know that's, that's very much connected with that idea of being part of the co-op movement and particularly when, later I mean actually so that was '88 and it was 2000 that Ally worked at Frontline so, 12 years later, and I didn't even meet Ally so that '88, I met Ally '94 so it was 6 years later that I met Ally who became my partner and is still my partner and, we're still together 23 years later but he worked, at Frontline, with our two friends Katie and Gordon, between them, they ran Frontline for 1 or 2 years, until sadly, that also went bust [laughing] but that also, I mean that was explicitly political because it was a radical left-wing bookshop but, you know they had

⁴ Ran Basta Pasta

all, Katie and, Gordon and, Ally had all been active in the local Manchester political scene I mean Manchester's got really strong political history anyway, and they all knew each other partly through having been political activists mostly around, the...CJB, the Criminal Justice Bill which was, '95, and that was, the, government trying to outlaw, raves, and demonstrations they sort of lumped it all together so they were trying to say that you couldn't have, more than, it was a really small number something like more than 20 people? More than 20 people gathered in a public place, were, you know, had to have permission, and they, they would, it was a deliberately aimed at, the rave scene, and, the fact that there was lots of, demonstrations going on around, sort of green issues, motorways, there were lots of demos against the building of motorways in Manchester there was the M66, which was built through, a beautiful area of countryside called Daisy Nook so there was a massive protest to save Daisy Nook, and that was how my partner and Gordon and Katie all kind of met each other and we've got a photo of my partner up a tree in a shopping trolley at Daisy Nook trying to save it from the motorway [laughing] as you know the motorway's there now so it didn't actually work but, [laughing] but that, part, that movement the kind of the whole eco-movement, campaigning against motorways there was stuff all over the country and that was the CJB, Criminal Justice Bill was partly aimed at that as well it was trying to say, ' we don't want bunches of young people suddenly arriving in warehouses and fields and having big parties and we also don't want them climbing up trees and sitting in shopping trolleys and trying to stop us from building roads so, we'll try and kind of, target them both at once' [laughing].

[36:45]

And did you ever find you had any backlash, in terms of, if you had a poster up in the shop, you know if you had extremist right wing groups or, nothing like that?

No, no, I was never, not that I remember, so I know that, there were issues, with the Clause 28 campaign that, some of the demos were targeted by, far right groups, but they were so small, compared to the size of the movement so all of the, I think possibly the CJB stuff as well but, then that's anyway that's not specifically round the co-op I mean those were political movements that I was involved in at the same time as I was working with co-ops, I certainly was never aware of, co-ops themselves being targeted for being, co-ops and I don't remember there being any problem with Immy having these anti-apartheid posters up, at Basta Pasta I

don't, remember, that doesn't mean it didn't happen, but if it did it obviously wasn't a big deal, because it hasn't left any, anything in my consciousness so.

[37:49]

And what did, out of interest, what did you go on to, after you finished at Basta Pasta?

So Basta Pasta was while I was at University so that was while I doing a maths and philosophy degree and, when I graduated, I worked, for, the register office, so more admin because unfortunately I didn't, actually want to do any of the things you can do with a maths degree so I didn't want to work in finance, and I didn't want to be an accountant and I didn't want to work on the stock market and the only other, obvious thing to do with a maths degree is to be a maths teacher, and that was originally my plan, that's what I thought I was going to do, do a maths degree, do a PGCE, become a maths teacher, but while I was doing my degree I met a lot of teachers who just said, 'you don't want to be a teacher', and they convinced me so, I was a bit kind of 'oh, I don't know what I'm going to do now then', so I, I got an admin job because I knew how to do that, at the registry office, I ran a play-scheme, after that I ran a play-scheme, for young kids in a deprived area of Stockport in Adswood, then I became a housing officer, worked for the council for a couple of years, then I went back to college, did a masters, and retrained in computing and that's what I've been doing ever since pretty much, apart from the fact actually, so, its now, '95 was when I graduated, so in '95 I had my first job, as a software engineer, so that was, 23 years ago, but, in the middle of that 23 year period, there was a 4 year period where I left IT for various reasons, I was a freelance writer for 2 years, and, then I retrained as a maths teacher, I finally decided that I wanted to give that a go then I realised no, that they were all right when they told me it was awful [laughing], so I came running back to IT [laughing], I've been here ever since, I actually, I do really love my job, so there is actually there's a sort of a connection with what I do now, because now, I'm very interested in, Agile ways of working, so Agile is very much a thing that's used a lot in the IT industry, and there's also this thing called XP which stands for extreme programming, and both of them face, for, place a lot of emphasis on collaboration, it's all about collaboration, it's all about working together, with XP there's this thing called paired programming, where you don't work on your own, you work as a pair, so you have one computer, one piece of software that you're writing but you work very closely literally sit next

to each other all day, you work on one, on the same computer, so it's very very collaborative, so that kind of takes you all the way back to the co-operative movement you know, the idea that we can collaborate, and there's this really, so the consultancy that I work for, Thoughtworks, we place this massive emphasis on collaboration, and Thoughtworks themselves, have a really strong global, so it's a global organisation, and there's this really strong global emphasis on, social justice, and Thoughtworks was, set up, by a guy called Roy Singham, who was a civil rights activist in America, and originally you know I think he pretty much set up Thoughtworks to fund, his activism, so the, the organisation's got quite a strong kind of political root, and it's very unusual in the way that it treats it's employees, there's a very flat structure, with, it's not hierarchical, everybody's equal, you don't have a line manager, it's all about collaboration and co-operation, so it's not actually a co-op but, but it's still, it's quite unusual in the way that it, it's set up, and there's a really strong emphasis on, on co-operation and, you know everybody being equal and, everybody mattering, they do a lot of stuff around diversity, so their, they put a lot of effort into, trying to create opportunities for people who are underrepresented in tech, and there's you know, there's a lot of kind of, you know helping out local campaigns, with, websites and, whatever so, yeah.

Full circle

Yeah,yeah

[41:45]

And do you see that kind of mirrored quite a lot, in the tech industry today?

Yes! Yes, there's loads of it. So, I mean Thoughtworks are a particularly good, a particularly good example, but there is now this really strong emphasis on, you know everybody's trying, to work, so there's this concept of self-organising teams, which I find fascinating, and, so again its, its kind of back to the co-operative model, and the self-organising team the idea is, its actually its quite difficult to do it in practice but the idea is, that everybody, gets a say, in what they do, so, rather than it being top-down, you give a team autonomy, you give them a product that they're working on but you get, there allowed to decide how they do it, they're allowed to decide their own priorities, they're equal, so you know they're self-organising you know they, they do things for themselves so I find it fascinating that, it's really all quite

socialistic, but people don't talk about it very much in political terms so Thoughtworks is unusual because they are more explicitly political, but the idea of Agile collaboration and co-operation, although it's, you know quite a strong idea that gets talked a lot about in IT it, it's not often explicitly political even though to me it clearly is, but, it's just about how to make good software, and it just happens to be true that, people work better when they collaborate, you know people, are better motivated when they have control over their working environment, and when they actually get a say in what they're doing, people just, it just does work better, and there's so, so there's conferences about Agile, so I now speak at conferences, so it's one of the things that I do as part of my career, and just almost as a hobby really is I, write blog posts, and talk about collaborative working, and, and ways of working more effectively and, so its, its something that I'm really interested in, so, yeah.

[43:31]

It is really interesting how its yeah, not called worker co-ops but it's very similar.

It's very similar, it's a similar concept, yeah.

Well those are all the questions that I'd like to ask unless there's kind of anything that you don't think we've covered?

No, I don't think, I think we've probably covered loads and loads there.

Yeah, it's really interesting thank you – I'll pop the recorder off