

Part one

A: Tell me what you had for breakfast

J: Avocado, smashed egg and a bit of sourbread

(Discussion about feedback from headphones)

A: Okay, begin at the beginning. What's your first memory?

J: Oh, I can't.. I've got, I don't know which comes first, but three quite distinct images in my mind and then.. One, I wasn't even walking. But I'm told that I always shuffled backwards. There was one of three aunts over the road, who I reckon were lesbians, because they were not related to us but these three women lived together. And they were very middle class, it was suddenly a different part of the neighbourhood. 'Cause I was born on the edge of Mersey Park in Birkenhead that looked over the River Mersey. The top of Sydney Terrace and er at the end of there, there was a little terrace block. Just over the road there were these slightly bigger houses that were more middle class, you know. Whereas ours were two up and two downs, suddenly over the road there were these red brick sort of Georgian houses. And theirs was, I think it was three stories, I might have made that up but it seemed very big. I know they had four bedrooms, and that was big. Anyway, they nicknamed me Nancy Shufflebottom, so I was known as Nancy Shufflebottom for the first two years of my life.

Um other than that I was also known as Joodle, because I went everywhere with this toy poodle and I had very curly hair, I was born jaundiced with black curly hair. And my mother always says, and this kind of says the time, the era and how old she was and where she came from, she said you were a darky, if you'd been born in hospital I would have given you back.

So, my earliest memory is shuffling backwards into this cupboard under the stairs and smelling the diesel oil on me dad's um overalls and pulling the, I was tugging at this until eventually I pulled it down off the hook. And I just wanted to smell it.. But as I pulled it down this little silver tin came tumbling out of his pocket. And it kind of fell open. And inside was this shag of tobacco and I loved the smell of it and the taste of it and so I shoved me little nose in and me mouth. And then I was choking on it and drooling on it and got high on the taste of this stuff whatever it was. And I just remember people screaming at me, running in, and the thing they were most upset about was all the tobacco I'd eaten. Not me, whether I was going to live or die, suffocate in there, but that is probably, it's got to be my earliest memory thinking about it because I wasn't walking. And I learnt to walk by the age of two. Just before two. So that's me earliest memory.

And much of my early life has been reconstructed by the story tellers around me. And by God my family are storytellers. So my father's Irish Catholic, my mother's Protestant, they each

came from quite feuding families. We learnt about conflict around the table, whenever we got to the table. It was a very poor family, we had to move about a lot, oftentimes we moved because we were moving from neighbours, um or we were moving because our families were not getting on and they'd just up and go.

Another earliest memory is suddenly piling everything up in the back of this van. And we couldn't fit the dog in, Shep. But me dad was really pissed off with this dog anyway because it didn't even belong to us to begin with, it kind of (..) us and stuck to us. And I just remember watching Shep disappear down the road because he was chasing the van for a long while. And then the dog could never quite catch up with us. So I never saw Shep again. Um

The story my father always told was that I was born lucky, because I was born on the full moon, on the 26th March, 1960. And I was born at home and he was sent down the hill from Mersey Park, to go down to the Essoldo Bingo Hall and go and fetch the midwife, because they'd been knocking up and down the street to find out where was the midwife. And there were three pregnant women in that same little run of hovels, you know, at the edge of the park and um. So the midwife was in and out of the houses pretty regularly. And he couldn't find her, and he was told that she was down at the bingo. And when he got down the hill, she'd won a line. So she wouldn't come. He had to wait until she was allowed to play the next game. And then she won house. And everyone was in uproar that the midwife, her name was Nurse Minks, which I always thought was a brilliant name, I've got to put it in a play one day. What a brilliant name!

And I was the last child um that she had a, was there present for, allegedly, she didn't actually make it up the hill in time. So she stopped for a sherry. And they got up the hill. And me dad was there getting more and more anxious um but this is why he said I was born lucky, basically, because not only did she win a line, she won house. And then they made it up the hill. And finally when they got in I was already born. Now me mother's version of that story is that the midwife had popped in earlier that night and told me mum to run up and down the stairs to start the baby off. And she kind of left her to it and she said you're not crowning, you're nowhere near giving birth. Um and then she told her to keep some cold water in a bath up there and if the time came to run up and down and get some hot water. Imagine telling a nine months pregnant woman ready to give birth..anyway whatever.

So she was supposed to get the kettles ready, get the hot water and go up, but she had a bath of cold water ready, because that was supposed to be used, she was supposed to be using hot water to cold water to help her give birth, anyway whatever. By the time they got up the hill I was already born, but the umbilical cord was wrapped very awkwardly in between my legs, round one leg and then up. And she said that, you know, she didn't know what to do with it, she was exhausted, they walked in and me dad went ballistic with pleasure because he thought he'd had a boy. So she said, he was a drunken eejit, she said I've no doubt he'd stopped to celebrate this bloody game of bingo and by the time the pair of them came in slightly tipsy I was already born, she said you might as well have been sat there smoking a pipe as far as your

father was concerned because you were a boy. And he started singing Kevin Barry and I was going to be called Kevin.

And then, me mother was obviously distressed by that and said this is a girl and then the midwife stepped forward with the scissors and snipped the umbilical and tied the knot. And he went apeshit and threw her out of the house,. Dismembering my child. So, I mean he was mad, he was mad.

So you don't know how much of that was drunken talk and how much of it was him genuinely believing that he had the son he'd longed for at last, you know. Because I was the third child along the way. Um my mother never believed in going to the hospital because her first baby was taken from her and set to one side and she was never allowed to see or touch that child. She knew she'd had a baby girl, because she saw them lift the baby out and she saw the sex of the baby. And um,.so she got as far as naming her Josephine, I think she called her after herself, Shirley Josephine Patricia, me mum's named Shirley. Um but they took that baby from her and they set it aside and 'let nature take its course'. And my mother never forgave them because the next day, the day after, she'd be crying for her baby, because she said everybody else had been given their child. Nobody talked to her. And part of this was punishment because she was only eighteen. And she was an unmarried mother. And she'd been sent up to Edinburgh where she was at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital where she gave birth. And it was a medical hospital with its own museum attached. And she remained convinced that they'd kept that baby. And um, she was screaming to the nurse to bring her baby, bring her baby, bring her baby. And the nurse said to her oh you wouldn't want that, nobody would want that, it's been thrown in the incinerator. So of course my mother was screaming at the thought of her baby being thrown into an incinerator, why, why?

And the matron, this is old-school days, so the matron um came and slapped her face, told her to pull herself together and she said you've had a monstrous birth.

And so those stories were in my life very early on. Very early on. Which is why it's mattered so much to me to be working with the museums over the last couple of years. But yeah, I had two very different stories about my birth. And one of them is ..I was very lucky. And the other one was I was a dismembered boy. And I was gonna be called Kevin. And I'd been spared that. And me mother said, well, I've already chosen a name and it's Julie and you can have Kevin Barry or some part of it for her second name. And in the end they (...) on Karen. Dunno why that was, close to Kevin Barry, I'll never know. Anyway.

My very early years were kind of coloured by my father's disappointment for not having a boy. Because even before I was born he'd painted the cot blue, the room blue and everything else blue. Um and he treated me like a son. Which is where the story of 'Pig Tales' comes from. My father writing the landscape of his disappointment across my life. But in the first few years, I was a boy. And so I was dressed like a little boy, I behaved like a little boy, my father took me more seriously etcetera etcetera. Um.

What do I know about the rest of my life? Um. The child that was born just after me died after four hours or something. And er, so my mother's first born was the child that was described as a monstrous birth, who was literally laid aside, left aside and not supported to live in any shape or form, let nature take its course. Then there was our Denise, who has spina bifida. And she had quite a difficult childhood because my mother never let the nursing staff know that she'd had an earlier baby who died. So Den was experimented on in the early parts of her life and she had quite a lot of I would say unnecessary operations, because they thought she had polio. But if my mother had fessed up to this first child, they might have put two and two together and realised it wasn't polio at all. But it was in the days when they didn't really know what they were doing anyway. So they tried all manner of operations on her. Um but she and I were pretty tight, we were raised like twins because there's only twelve and half months between us. And um we were both placed with our grandmother at various times. I think each of our grandmothers eventually became involved in our upbringing. But my father's mother was quite cold to us, because she didn't like my mother because she was protestant. And she didn't like my mother anyway because she thought my mother was flighty and um flirtatious and far too good looking. And er, the truth be known I don't think she liked my father. So my grandmother was really cold with us. She was a difficult woman to be around. (Aunty)

And so one of my earliest memories is my grandmother marching us down the cinder path, which leads to a quarter of a mile of Merseyside's concentration of care homes. And we were left first of all at St Catherine's Hospital, I just remember being left on the steps by me grandmother. And all I can remember, it's weird really, is I remember the walk, I remember being left on the steps and I remember looking down and seeing our feet side by side. And we had slippers on. And I was ashamed because I knew we shouldn't have slippers on outside. And er I can still feel my sister's hand in my right hand sitting on those steps. But to this day I can't remember what happened afterwards, after the Matron telling us off and um, I just remember she had great big tits actually and sort of blue uniform, I'm sure it began there. And her yelling at us, what are you doing here? Well as if we knew what we were doing there! Know what I mean?

So that was another very early memory. And the reason we were there was because my grandmother couldn't cope. But also because me mother had been put inside St Catherine's Hospital. And she was giving birth to Linda and Linda died. And my mother went mad with grief, so whatever went on, you can see why the poor woman never liked hospitals, er we were then put in care, I don't know how long we were in there. I remember on the day we got out because I remember me Auntie Brenda and me nan, me mum's mum, who was always a joy to be around, me mum's mum was Greta Minto. Her name was Gertrude and something else but I've never known her original name. But her husband she eventually married came from the highlands, from Oban, he was a traveller. And she had had ten children and so many men she couldn't remember them, my father doesn't remember, no my mother doesn't remember her own dad, I don't think she'd met him. But she was told it was this man called Les Coathup.

And so they took his name, her and another younger sister. But she was raised with nine brothers and sisters, the last, the little one, John, died, um, but my grandmother had no female friends, but lots of gentlemen callers, she had the most amazing funeral on Merseyside, my nan. And um some described her as a round-heeled woman, d'you know what that is?

A: Yeah.

J: A woman who spends a lot of time on her back. And er whatever way of it, I've never judged her because I never heard that woman raise her voice, she was the best story-teller I ever had, she taught me everything I knew about telling a good story, she kept a tin of photographs, an old biscuit tin that she'd recommissioned for her trading stamps for pain. And she had a story for each one of those old photographs. And every time I needed soothing, she would sit me right next to her and tell me a story about the people in these pictures. And some stories became favourites and I'd go back and say tell me about Uncle Charlie from Chicken Farm. She'd oh, that man, oh what I know about that man. And then there'd be a new story. And there would always be some new detail of the old stories as well and I'd think 'She didn't tell me that last time. She never said he had a ginger beard. She never said that at all.' So then I'd ask about the ginger beard and she'd go off on one about the red beard and where it came from really.

So she was a fascinating character. And er on the day we got out of care she arrived with me Auntie Brenda in this old, slightly beaten-up, light blue Zephyr that she had no business driving cause she couldn't drive. Bumping along the road, threw us in the back of the car and took us to, this is me and Our Den, took us to New Ferry and we were on the edge of the River Mersey there at New Ferry. And we stayed in Brenda's House with her then boyfriend, Ken. And they brought us this teddy bear that came home with us and I was terrified of it because it was bigger than me and it had only one eye, the other one was hanging out. So um, even the toys were disabled, um yeah, that's another very early memory. And that one is as fresh in me mind, the day we arrived at that place, I remember being in this kind of, it was um, the back of the house, and it must have been a rented house because it seemed to be, in fact maybe was three stories, maybe four, they're still there, these old buildings on the edge of the River Mersey. And they were like boarding houses or bed and breakfast places. And they had all sorts of people, they even had, there was a couple of rooms that these fellers were sharing a bed, like literally they'd have the bed on shifts. And em so they were working at the docks or they were working down the em where the boats were at the moorings um, all manner of jobs that were getting around there actually, me dad always odd-jobbed but he also me dad worked at Cammell Lairds shipping. But I remember being in that house and it was like well is this a B and B, I wouldn't have known the words to that in those early days, I was very very young, but I couldn't work out why these men were sharing a bed but they never got to meet. They had to make the bed and then move on. And so there were very few things in the house kind of thing. But I was fascinated by comings and going, it was a very busy place, that was near New Ferry baths which was one of my favourite places to go and play.

So disability was a big part of my life from Day One, from a very early consciousness of the world. And that was my normal world, I remember (regular) appointments, being taken with my sister and having our feet measured up, we were compared like twins. And they watched me growing and her growing and measured us constantly. It always irritated the hell out of me that she would get an injection or something and spoonful of something and then a sugar lump. And I didn't get that. Why didn't I get that? So I always thought whatever she had going for her she had undivided attention. So we used to scrap like hell. And she had, um, a caliper on her leg, now which leg has she lost, oh it'd be her right leg, because her foot started turning inward as she started to walk. And then the foot stopped growing, so it was smaller than the other side of her. And it was part of, she had spina bifida occulta, which is um, it's not as complicated as full-blown spina bifida where you have a kind of knotty neurons at the end of your spine and the sac sometimes grows outside your body. And hers was much more internal mashup. And it messed with the way her leg grew. So she has quite an interesting, well I say has, she hasn't any more because she had the leg removed four years ago. Um, yeah, she wore a caliper with metal rods and she had great boots, I was always jealous of those boots. She had these beautiful brown leather boots. And I used to think why don't I get boots like that. And you look back and you think what a shame, I was the tomboy who thought I was a boy and was reared as boy for the first few years. And she was such a pink fluffy girly girl, d'you know what I mean, she wanted to do jazz, tap, ballet um Latin American, all things I loathed. And she had to wear these bloody boots that were a constriction. And I remember when we were being bathed I would leap out of the bath first so I could try her boots on and stomp around in them. And my mother would go nuts and clip me one. 'You've got two perfectly good feet, what's wrong with you? Wear your own shoes.' And I'd think, I really want them.

And the other thing those boots remain in my mind for is I would get a good kicking out of those boots from my sister cause when she was annoyed with me they came in really handy to beat the shit out of me. And then my mother would come in and my sister would go Waaa, those kind of crocodile tears. And I'd be the one bruised and beaten. And me mother would then be smacking me round the house and clipping me, going how could you do that to your poor sister, can't you see her struggles. I'd think she's not going to be struggling at all, she's whacking me there, she's tooled up. So these are all early memories that have served me well, let me tell you.

So yeah, there was a sister after me that died, then there was another sister way after her who would be eight and a half, nine years younger than me. And she was the product of a rape. My mother always believed it was a woman's right to choose abortion, but she could never choose that herself. And so, she chose to have that child. And um, that's my younger sister who carries such a difficult story. The guy in question was known as Uncle Morris, he was a neighbour who lived directly opposite us. And what I remember well about him was that he had an eye for any young girl in our street, *any* young girl. And I watched him really carefully because he would try and dabble with me and try and dabble with my sister. And I knew that man was obsessed with money. And so I carefully learnt the code of his safe, which he kept under his highly polished desk. How I knew that code, I don't know, but he used to play these

really weird games with me and have me crawl on my hands and knees under his desk. So I also remember his phone number to this day, because I used to make phone calls to him (*Gives number*). You're more than happy to publish that to the world. And I would make phone calls to that man and tell him I knew where to hurt him most and it would be his wallet. And he had better change the code of his safe, because I had it committed to memory. I don't know what induces a child of nine, ten to be making those phone calls to somebody like that, but I did that for a long time. Until about the age of twelve when it came to the notice of somebody on our school corridor that I was making these return phone calls on the new coin box phone they'd installed in the corridor, which presumably was supposed to be in case of emergencies, but I used it for recreation and I would ring him constantly. And I would say that very quickly they picked up that I was making abusive phone calls and not only making abusive phone calls but reversing the charges, which you could do in them days.

So I was always up for detentions or having to visit the headmistress's office blah blah blah. So quite early on really, we were identified as a problem family and social services became involved in the family. I was quite imaginative as a kid, and so on the one hand whilst I knew things were in deep shit back at the ranch, I also knew that there was bigger shit out there. And certainly under that polished desk of that (..) man, Uncle Morris. And so I never ever opened up to the social services or anyone who snuck into our family to try and offer help. We could have been beating shit out of each other until the doorbell went, and then, I think her name was Melody (...) And I thought who called her kid Melody, who could stand up in class and put their hand up to that name. Poor woman came in, trying to talk to us and we just closed ranks, it was like, no, there's no problem inside here. Move along the bus. Nothing to see here. And so I was a wizened, watchful child very early on. And that's stood me in good stead. I'm quite a shrewd observer, if you like, of um the worlds about me and I move through many worlds, er got friends in high places, friends in low places. And that comes in handy. It has fed me in terms of the theatre I make, or the mischief I make on stage. And I've always had a really strong sense of social justice. Because I kind of knew from an early age that the mess this family was in, the mess this family was making, was very much to do with poverty. And I was a bright kid, I got a scholarship to go to grammar school. But I was the only kid in an extended family to go to grammar school until my sister nine years younger went after me. Till she was expelled, but that's another story. But um, yeah, quite a difficult upbringing I would say, it had its traumas but you know, you muddle through, you get by, kind of moulds who you become. And for me I learned very swiftly that I needed to get out of there and find me own way.

Actually, I'll never forget this as another early memory. I was three and a half when I first left home. And it was because we were coming back in somebody's car with a heap of shopping. And there was me, and Den and me mother who was in the habit of wearing this purple Crimplene cabaret dress, like a cocktail frock she went out in during the day, with dyed blonde hair, her original hair was dark brown, me father always called her Coco, all the days of her life she was Coco. But she wore her hair blonde because that's the thing of the day. And she wore it up in a bun. And she was sat there, I don't know who had given us a lift but we were

driven home to the edge of Mersey Park, where she tumbled out with these bags of shopping and our Den ran in, and I saw me chance. Cause on the way up the hill I'd seen these little people going into this house with these coloured balloons, I thought they were balls, actually, I didn't know what a balloon was, outside the house. And they were all going in in a little train and I thought I'm gonna go there. So while they weren't looking I ran down the hill. I still had reins on, cause I was given to wandering off. And so I went down the hill, and I saw the coloured balls and I saw these, there were two tall people and they had two little people with them. And I just joined in. And when the door opened walked in. And so.. Nobody had noticed that I'd just clung on to this little party and walked in. And very swiftly I realised that this was the place to be at, and they were having a massive party. There was this long table, it was covered in food, we didn't see that amount of food in our house. And they had plates of these, well I now know they were like um fairy cakes, these people baked! They made cakes! Who has time to bake in a house like where we came from? So my lasting memory was going into this house, eating my way from one end of the room to the other, puking everywhere because I was just eating so much I was sick. And this woman picking me up and putting me on her knee and plopping me in between these two huge bosoms. And she had a brown knitted cardigan on which made these bosoms interesting to feel. Cause there was a lot of texture, like an Arran cable kit. And so I was just fondling her the whole time. I started there, d'you know what I mean? But she had these magnificent breasts and I was sitting in between them, quite happy. And um, she had long, long silver grey hair which she just flicked round one hand and put up in a bun. I don't know how you do that. But literally, with one hand, did it in a knot, boof up in a bun. Didn't need any of the crap me mother had on. She had a doughnut sponge thing, with a hairy thing on, piled her hair on that and then a comb went round, a plastic circular comb went round, tucked in to create the appearance of a bun, that's what me mum did, took her ages. This woman no - flip, switch, knot, doomf, done. I was impressed. We sat together waiting as the clock ticked by. And all manner of taller people came to collect the smaller people. They tried to entertain those remainders of us, the stragglers, with a game of, they called it pass the parcel, well I didn't want to give the parcel back, very happening there were all these things in it. So I was obviously not ready for this party, I was too small, d'you know what I mean, I hadn't learned to share, um so I was creating a right ruck. So they kept looking round to see, well where's this person's parents. I mean I managed to tell them me name, Joodle. So, she realised finally that no-one was coming for this child and I still needed entertaining or feeding or something, I must have now been falling asleep between these bazoomas. And they had to think well where's this child come from. So they sent somebody out to know up and down the road until finally they found me mother who was still unpacking whatever nonsense had gone on. I must have been away a couple of hours at least. And she hadn't noticed I was gone. That says it all. Yes, but all these little moments I think, they kind of weave who you are. I've always been an adventurer, I've always known that there's a party out there somewhere I haven't been invited to, Allan, but I'm gonna find my way there. And I'll find my way in. And I'll find somebody with big breasts in the room, that's what'll happen! So I guess all of that, and the backdrop of the politics of the time, of what was happening in Northern Ireland, what was happening to our family, we've got part of our family we've never spoken to who live in Larne, who are, you know,

just outside Belfast. Part of our family down South, part of our family, I've got a half-brother in Mayo for God's sake, who's also me cousin. That's another story. You've probably met Michael, he worked with Colin for a while on DAIL magazine. Michael MacNamara. They want off to America. He's also disabled, and on the same side of his body as our Den. It's funny, I've just seen Mike, he's just been over from Mayo. Actually, he lives in Westport now, but he lived in Ballahadrine for years. Um. So I would say honestly, we're a family of survivors, we were a family of outsiders among outsiders. There are a lot of Irish families who live up and down the river at the Mersey and they came over to build the tunnels. And they came over to work in Cammel Lairds. But most of them were firmly Catholic or Protestant. Er those of us who broke the rules and broke (...?) created a ruck. Not just in each of those communities, which were very sectarian and driven by violence and, and they would say passionate politics, I would say most of them were ill-informed, more passion than politics, politically aggressive if not necessarily politically aware um. But we learned to rub along and then there were people who challenged that constantly and Liverpool would be the first place you'd settle because it was the people's republic. Although we lived in Birkenhead.

Now, a lot of our family would say the McNamara's were trying to get out of Ireland for a long long time. And a lot of people who saved up and saved up to get a ticket were hoping to go to the New World. They really wanted to go to the freedom of America. Um. And nobody really understood how long it took to get there. So the ten hour crossing from Belfast to Liverpool, it's actually ten and a half, um they would have thought after all of that sea-sickness etcetera, they'd come to the New World. So a lot of people were just dumped at Canning Dock or Albert Dock or wherever they were docking at the time and said 'we're here'. And then it took them a while, maybe a few weeks to realise they're not in America at all, they're in a place called Liverpool. It's not much different from where they've just come from, d'you know what I mean? And that has been the hardship of a lot of people's stories of the original kind of the duped tickets, you know, people who came to the land of the free and ended up with a life of bloody hard work on a tiny little city that was actually built on slavery.

And, and those stories were told to me very early on as well, you know. Um how about Irish women and girls were passed through Liverpool, treated as breed mares and sent off to the New World to um create the next generations. Anyway. (..) a great chunk of that. I found an old book, literally an exercise book from when I was seven or eight. And it was about, we 'd been for a visit to the Lady Leverhulme Gallery, and it must have been my very first visit from school. And this book is about my pictures of William Wilberforce and how he was gonna help people who were slaves on a boat somewhere out there. And the story I've written was very much like the story I put out there in 'Crossings' when I was looking at um forced migration, sexual slavery. And there was three voices, the ghosts on the ship who visit that young girl trying to leave a gang. And the conceit of a modern day Scrooge if you like, but inside that looking at those three stories of different women who went through Liverpool at different times. An enslaved African woman, a woman from Ireland who was taken through that city and sent off on the transport boats to New Zealand, and the story of a girl on Canning Dock who, they all have the same price on their heads, thirty pound. And that was one of the threads through the

story. But that story 'Crossings' is not that far away from the story I wrote when I was seven. And that kind of put in my mind that actually not much changes, does it? Was it John Donne, the poet who said, 'Give me the child until he is seven and I will show you the man'?

A: That's a Jesuit thing. It's not Donne, it's a traditional Jesuit thing.

J: I wonder where that came from then originally, that teaching., Anyway, that stays with me and I look at that and I think oh god there you go. Not much has changed. Somebody else spoon-fed me that, you know.

So my early life is dotted with stories of upheaval, moving, constantly on the move. Um that didn't change when I finally left home. I left home about seventeen, went to art college in Chester, decided I was gonna be a ceramicist, I was gonna be a potter first of all and a photographer. And then while I was at art college in Chester I got embroiled in a theatre company. And the theatre company there were very excited by me storytelling more than anything. And that I could write stories very swiftly and move people about in a space very swiftly. I can imagine them, because it was such a vivid world I'd come from, you know I think back to my grandmother really, Greta Minto with all those stories and all those children she had to entertain with her tin of biscuits with no biscuits in. Yeah, so I started getting interested in theatre.

My first interest in theatre actually was from a teacher, a drama teacher who was sick and tired of seeing me up for detentions when I was so naughty in the early years of school. And her name was June Lancelyn Green. They owned this huge house out on a hill out in Poulton Lancelyn Estate. And er at school she was often known as June Green. But she was Mrs Lancelyn Green to the kids, d'you know what I mean, funny I speak as though I wasn't a kid but, but me I wasn't really. I was already working on market stalls by the age of thirteen/fourteen, but I remember I was always in trouble at school, or often in trouble and so I had lots of detentions. And she happened to be the teacher I kept meeting in detention. And this one day I walked in and she just put her head in her hands and she was tugging at her hair. And she said, ah, I can't believe it, not you again, I'm not sitting in this room with you again. And I went oh alright then I'll go home and she said no, you won't, you're coming home with me. Well, she'd probably be done for child abuse nowadays. She took me home in her car, I thought this was really exciting, and I went home with her to her place and, I just remember we went though these long lanes out the back of Spital, and er, out the back of Spital, Spital is a posh place down the way, it's hard to believe that, this is posh for Liverpool. And um these long winding lanes took us past the farmland and into this place where there was these old grey crumbling walls and we went through this, I thought oh my god, the poor woman lives in a care home. It was like one of these big places you put people away. And of course I'd had experience of a care home so I knew what the front gates looked like, and the walls around them and everything and I thought, ah that's so sad, so sad I feel sorry for her. And I was kind of watching everything, listening out for her story, who is she, who is this woman. And she was blethering on about the amount of times I had put her to trouble and that actually you know

that did I need to be doing detention yet again with you Julie McNamara, blah blah blah. Anyway rant rant rant, nag nag nag, got to the front door and she pulled the bell and there was this big big big and somebody answered the door and um he just looked a bit miserable this guy that let her in and I thought oh god he must be one of the care (..), the people that look after you. Then we were shown into this kitchen and I looked on the floor and I thought oh no, that's really sad, she had no lino on the floor, no lino, just these kind of big ceramic tiles that I just thought it must be cold how could you live with just stone on the floor, that's dreadful.

And then she sat me at this long, long table, and I couldn't see any of the other residents of the care home at this point. And she opens this bloody big fridge that was big enough for a homeless family and gave me a bowl of cold soup. And then she said, I'm gonna give you something to read, she says and you're gonna read it and you're gonna read it aloud. And so this cold soup I now know was probably something like Vichyssoise or gazpacho or something. And I just thought that was really tight, she'd run out of money for her meter. Really tight, I thought how sad. And so I literally, I had fifty p pocket money in the back of me um trousers, cause I always wore shorts under me skirt. And I found the fifty p and I just pushed it on the corner of the table. So when I finished reading I left 50p for her, for her meter. Which she must have found later, thinking about it. Anyway she had me read, for the first time I'd ever read a play, never been to theatre or anything like that, you know. Theatre for me was working on the market, that was bloody theatre. Which I loved. I remember next door to me 'Come on, girls, don't be shy, get your knickers off Auntie Vi.' Antie Vi used to do lonjeray, 'girls' knickers, ladies' bloomers, anything girls that you can choose us', all these little rants she had throughout the day. What a character, she was brilliant. And I used to do rag trade for this guy called Mohamed Hassan Malik. And Malik's fashions were in Market Road for bloody years. And I worked for him for about two years. Until he started going weird, weird, kind of sexualised behaviour. And then I did a runner.

But yeah. June Lancelyn Green. Amazing. So what she gave me to read was 'Othello'. I would have been thirteen. And I had never read a play before. And when I first started to read it, I went, 'There's all these voices, what are all these voices?' And it really excited me that you could write something like that that had all these voices come alive on the page. And I started reading it out loud. And she said, no, don't read it like that, read it in your own voice. So I read it in my own voice. And I could hear these people speaking to each other and I was going 'why's he so bad?' And she said, now, you think you're an outsider, do you? What do you think was driving Othello? And there was a really clever way she got me to think about this guy, I'm still passionate about that play. But I've never seen it done the way I'd fantasise about it, d'you know what I mean? Never. I've often thought actually, wouldn't it be interesting to do that with a group of people in a psychiatric hospital, d'you know what I mean? People who really are outsiders and people who really are absolutely down to the raw base emotion when it comes to 'Why did that nurse give you drugs then? And I've gotta wait for mine.' 'Who gave you that pass to go out last weekend. Who gave you that pass then. Why were you given a pass and not me?' You know all of that, the base kind of animal jealousy about I ain't gonna let you live unless you let me live. And relationships built on

fragile, fragile spaces. 'Who was that you were consulting with in the day room? Who said you could dance with him? Who gave you that lipstick? Who put that lipstick, did you put that lipstick on? I've seen that very same lipstick on soandso's handkerchief.' All of that, I thought wow! Yep.

But, she made me read it. I got really excited by that script. And then she gave me some other nonsense called 'A Basket Full of Stars' and said she wanted me to read for her in the Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool. So I ended up doing something for her anyway. But then I wanted to be naughty so I could get a detention so I could go and see her. But you couldn't be certain you'd always get her, you see. So sometimes I'd get the English teacher and she wasn't as great craic, she really wasn't. She said to me once, I was a waste of a grammar school education and I thought, 'I'll show you!' Now I came out of that school with ten O levels and four A Levels, probably with the highest score that they'd had. Apart from, I was, I failed me spoken English and um and I got a grade E for general knowledge, cause I didn't have a bit of interest in what other people said was knowledge. Not a bit of it. It seemed to me it was reframed and twisted by other people's stories. And I didn't believe it. I knew enough not to trust it.

So the things that I really excelled at were drama, English and the arts. And um, oh and French. I was bloody good at the French language. So, yeah, I came out with a rake of papers that I've never had to show anyone ever again. So that was a heap of nonsense except to show to that English teacher, you were wrong about me. And then I did a runner and went to art college and then I started doing drama and then I made the biggest mistake of me life and had me first breakdown when I was nineteen/twenty, at Loughborough University, which I quickly found out had the highest statistics of suicides in the country. Loughborough University. And um, I had just chosen the wrong courses really. So I lasted there a year. And of course it was in the days when your grant was paid for, particularly if you came from a poor family they gave you a grant through the local education authority. And you also got match funding from social services if you'd come through that fast track which I then had. Um so I had to meet with ,it was kangaroo court, really, I had to meet with the Dean of the University, um a panel of tutors that I'd had contact with, including one that had stolen two of me sculptures when we had an exhibition. And I know that for a fact because sometime later he took us to his house to see this garden party and there were two of my sculptures in his garden. Yeah. What a twat! Anyway, never mind, he's probably still got them or he's dead. Oh well, maybe they're sitting on his grave for the good it did him. Yeah. He kept them. Why would you do that? Anyway, what a tea-leaf. So I had to provide them with a sound educational reason for leaving and a sound economic reason why I was a good investment for the future. And they're pretty tough questions to ask a nineteen/twenty year old, especially somebody who's bonkers. But I represented meself at that meeting. And I tore shreds off them. Um. I knew enough to know that I'd been told lies, that actually when I came down for the open day the things they'd promised me they'd never delivered. Um, I'd already spent a year at art college so I did not need to be spending another six months doing the golden section or, we weren't even introduced to the studios. So I had the run of me own studios back in Chester when I was at

art college, you could develop your own work and do what you needed to do. And I was very self-motivated and obviously unmanageable, nobody was guiding me.

But when I went to uni, oh my god it was so structured. And they locked the studios and you weren't allowed in unless there was somebody there guiding you, they were Health and Safety nuts, for god's sake. Which, raised in the kind of household I was, just made absolute nonsense, there was no logic to it whatsoever, d'you know what I mean? Yeah, look, I managed to give them enough to know that I was gonna be moved. And I'd already chosen where I was going. I'd chosen to go to Nottingham, to Trent. And there was a place at the time that was just outside it, began with a C, I can't remember, just on the way into Nottingham and they were doing creative arts. So, there was a brilliant team there who had said to me basically that they were inspired by what I brought to the table, the ideas I had and the reasons I gave them for leaving. And I said what I wanna do is combined arts. And I wanna do drama and art, and I said I'll decide what I want to do with that later in my life. Right now I wanna create my own combined arts degree. So they said there was something called creative arts and I could choose what I majored in and what I did to support that. And I said, and I'm coming in to the second year, I'm not doing another year here, I've done a year at art college, I've done a year at university and they've wasted my time. And I've already planned two placements, so I'm going to be working in the community. If you can live with that, so can I.

So for the first year, I did a term at Trent and then I did a term with Bazz Kershaw who is very well known in reminiscence theatre, working with older people, telling stories and retelling stories, old people's lives and songs and with their era. And he had a company called Fair Old Times, which was brilliant. And Bazz Kershaw put a lot of time and investment into me and the little team we were working with, I wasn't the only student that wanted to do that. And for a whole term we were out in the community, gathering stories from people, building relationships, going back to them to the various care homes and retelling those stories with the scripts that they'd given us, we'd carved if you like and the costumes they'd chosen erm you know props and objects and artefacts from their day and we brought them back and brought the show together. And it absolutely thrilled me that we could do that, that it had a meaningful impact. Something we were learning about, something we were doing was about building communities and making the relationships and reminding people that actually we're of equal value, all of us.. One of the reasons I took a breakdown was because I couldn't live in this plastic environment, you know, having worked on the market stalls and come from the kind of family I did, being in a university where I was put in these halls, where you never saw a cat, a dog, a child or an old person, and were being moulded in a certain way, it was like Kafka's trial. It was very odd, very odd for someone like me anyway. So it didn't sit well with me and I kept getting into trouble. And um, yeah so Loughborough wasn't good. But Nottingham was good.

That was a great move, it was an inspired guess really. I followed my intuition, I got into all sorts of trouble the first few years of uni, crazy trouble really. And I had to agree to see a psychiatrist, and I was an outpatient at the same time as I was completing my degree. So

three times a week I was at er Mapperly Park once or twice, St Anne's Hospital, three day week. And I remember coming home, I remember coming out of the session at St Anne's and I'd see this guy sitting on the second floor of his balcony. Er Er Er ah, are you a nutter. Don't you fucking call me a nutter, you spaz. I'm a spaz. You a nutter? I went yeah. What in there? Yeah, St Anne's. Come in here. I gotta beer. So I went up to get to know him, cause I thought any spaz who's got a can must be alright. So I went up to speak to him and it was Mike Devenny.

And Mike Devenny became a great mate of mine, he gave me my first ever job, proper jpb, d'you know, not like market stalls. And um he said he'd been watching me for the last year or so. Three days a week I'd go into this place and then you know at the end of the day I'd come out again and he'd think what the hell are they doing in there. So he just was interested. And em, obviously I took the same route home every day, so yeah. I went up there, opened a can with him, he said d'you want to come to a nightclub, we went to a nightclub and it was a gay club. And I was just fascinated by this guy. And I realised he knew a lot of the mates I knew from Trent, from the poly. And then he booked me to do this job and we became great mates, we went to all sorts of places together, you know. It was great, I was writing a piece of work with him around the music of the Gay Gordons, because the way he moved, the way his body leant in a particular way was just da diddle da dum, da da,derdedederdum, da diddle da dum. And we were doing this round and round the living room after a bit of speed and a pint. The Gay Gordons with me and Mike Devenny dreaming this mad show we were gonna do one day. Sadly, we never got to do it.

But we did write quite a bit together and I made these picture test cards of attitudes to disability, a whole series of psychological test cards. We talked about interrupting Rorschach ink blots and creating our own, sneaking in disabled people to see if we could get anyone to see disabled people differently. (...). Anyway that was brilliant. So Mike became very important in my life. And then I didn't see him for a while. And he'd moved to London without me knowing. And then, I moved down to St Albans where I ended up living and working in Harperbury Hospital for two years. And I was training as a drama therapist for two years. It was also a way of, I wanted to learn what had happened to me while I'd had a breakdown, and what kind of systems would support me and what did I need to know that I didn't know then and so I learnt everything there was to know at that stage anyway about psychology, about um what's that intense analysis? um and about group therapy. So the training course I chose, and there were two I'd been offered places on. There was Sesame down in London or there was St Albans in Hatfield College of Art and Design. And I went to Hatfield. Um because they did two years psychology, two years psychiatry, you had to be in individual analysis and you had to be in group therapy. Which was quite intense. But actually it was bloody brilliant because it gave me an understanding of group processes, the systems of how power is created, the structures we put in place to hold power and how power is moved swiftly when you're in group or out group. And er and those kind of processes have always been helpful to me.

But I thought, 'now I know it, I ain't joining that brainwashing gang'. Um, it was really helpful,

but drama therapy for me I thought was too arty-farty, a little bit too far removed from reality and I was now working in social justice. So I used it to work with young kids who were in the criminal system. I worked with kids who were in Intermediate Treatment, which was a kind of halfway step to social services and criminal justice system. I worked with people with learning disabilities. Both long-care hospitals, but also in residential care. And then I came up against the system myself again. Because I got a job as a residential social worker. Um I had just got the letter saying they were delighting in the success of my application. It was to work in a place called Bleak House, which is interesting. And um, I'd gone to meet them, the staff, we'd sorted out the rota, we'd been for a Christmas meal together and I was due to start on the sixth of January, I remember it well cause that's me sister's birthday. And em, actually it's not me sister, it's me niece, me sister's the 4th. Anyway, sixth of January.

So, on the day I was due to start, a letter arrived under my door, hand-delivered. And it basically said they were very sorry to disappoint me, I'd been unsuccessful in my application. And I looked at it and I thought, what? Unsuccessful? I'd got another letter telling me I was successful. I'd been out for a Christmas meal, we'd sorted out the rota, I've got it written down here. Can't tell me that. So I ignored that letter, which might well have gone under the doormat. And I turned up for work to shame them. And er, and the guy that answered the door just went bright red in the face. And he said, um, oh I'm very sorry, I can't let you in. I said what do you mean you can't let me in, I start work today. I said I'm a little bit early, d'you want me to come back? Cause I will. And he said, but we sent you a letter. And I said and what would that letter say? He said you were unsuccessful in your application. And he just didn't know what to say to me. And I went well how is that possible, cause I've got a letter here that says I'm successful. I said I've also got this file here that you gave me. When we went out for a Christmas meal and I was introduced to everybody, you gave me a folder with the rota on and all the welcome pack I've got here in my bag. And he went, I'm really sorry, you failed your medical. And I went, what medical? I didn't have a medical. What medical? I then, he said you'd better come in, I then discovered I had been failed a medical that I was never invited to attend. So I said who failed me? He said, your GP. I said I don't have a GP down here. He said you must have been obliged to register and I went, yeah, I'm registered down here, I said but I've never met them. He said, well, our occupational health team had to turn you down because of what the GP wrote. I said well what did the GP write?. He said I'm afraid I can't tell you that, he said that's discreet information but it's from your notes and they belong to the Secretary of State. I said, do they now? Watch this space. So I went and made an appointment with this GP I was supposed to be registered with, who I'd never met. Meanwhile I got in touch with the local press. I got in touch with the Communist Party because that's who I knew best and I didn't bother with the Conservative Party even though probably they would have been more active in St Albans. And um, the local press were a bit bizarre. There was a headline that went, 'Is this woman mad, bad or simply sad?' Which, I hate to say it, but I think it was used as a Sane slogan, wasn't it? I've forgotten her name, Marjorie Wallace, on the Sane campaign, 'mad, bad or simply sad?' they were using that many years later.

Anyway, but at that time that's what was in the press. It was in the St Albans Gazette, or whatever the shite it was. Um but I went to see that GP. I told him he'd lost me a job and that he needed to put that right. Okay, I said, what have you written on the notes that I lost that job? And actually, he was quite a reasonable guy, um and he said well let's have a look at what's in your notes. And I said, well let's have a look at what you wrote to the occupational health team, let's start there and work our way backwards. And what he'd written will never leave me. Because he wrote two lines. 'This woman is fundamentally emotionally unstable and unfit for work'

A: Wooow!

J: And we'd never met. We'd never met, Allan. And I, I looked at him and said I'm a very articulate human, with ten O Levels and four A Levels. I could wipe the floor with you intellectually. I choose not to be a doctor. But if I was in your place right now, I would choose very swiftly to put that right. I said I may be angry right now, but I'm not doing anything untoward, I'm not at risk of injuring anybody. But I am at risk of injuring your reputation, because I've got the press waiting. And I showed him the press card. And I said is there anything you want to say before I go further. And I said, and I will of course go for legal advice. And you and I know I will win. And so he apologised, actually, and he said I will do what I can to put this right, I'll get in touch with the occupational health team, I'll suggest they see you for a medical. I said, you know what, I'm gonna go one better than that. I'm going to suggest you see me for a medical. Because you've never met me before. I'm going to suggest you 'fess up and say you've made a terrible mistake, you've never met this woman before, she's new to the town and only just registered. And you'd mixed me up with somebody else. That's what I'm gonna suggest for you. And that's what we did. And while I was there I said, I'll tell you what we'll also do. I want to go through my notes and you tell me why you came to that decision. What on earth have you possibly read in somebody's notes you've never met, I said you were clearly frightened, so I said what frightened you so much?

And he said, he'd read stuff about my mother's attempted suicide, my sister's attempted suicide, I said okay so you think I'm going to commit suicide. I said, more than anything, I'm more likely to kill them. So I said, had you spoken to me, you would know that I'm not likely at this point in my life to try and attempt suicide. Anyway the long and the short of it was, he did the medical and agreed, we went through the papers, I ripped up my notes that I didn't want in there, sadly I found out later that they follow you round, that they're on some kind of computer nowadays and they reappeared in the notes. But I ripped them up in front of him and put them in the bin. And er he wrote a letter to the effect that um of course I was fit for work and you know there's been some mix-up with what he'd read and I was new to town and blah blah, freshly registered.

A: Well done!

J: Yeah, but it was at some cost. And I ended up, I mean that was six months later. I ended up,

I worked at that place for a year, I had a great time, it was fun. Um and it was a residential setting for people with learning disabilities and for me it was a move on from Harperbury Hospital, I felt like I'd become very depressed working there, d'you know what I mean, because I thought I was only on placement for a few months but once you go into a place like that you can't give up on people. I was determined to try and get people out. And I did use all of the kind of drama therapy techniques and group processes I had to try and inform the people I was working with to give them a chance to have an impact on decisions made about them.

So, we would use our sessions to role rehearse the case conferences. And I would literally encourage them to say what they needed to say. To work through who they were most frightened of in those sessions. And how they might behave differently so that they could change the outcome. And maybe they could have an impact on choosing where they wanted to live next. Choose who they wanted to live with, choose how they left that place. And you know what, almost all of them had very little say, very, very little say. Cause there was no such thing as review tribunal or a proper case conference where you were represented. All I had was me, lunatic here, offerer them role rehearsals and forged paper work as preparation.

Yeah, so that was a long time ago, but all of those things had an impact in who I became and what kind of em work I was going to write about or make on stage. All of those jobs, all of those earlier struggles had a bearing on who I later became and who I am today, you know, the decisions I've made. Look, I've come foul of the police, I've been sectioned on a 136 twice, um pretty messy sections, I lost my job, my home, my life as I then knew it. I remember at one point ringing Joe Bidder up from a police station and going Joe, I'm allowed a phone call, I'm afraid you're the only number I can ring just now but it's because I think you thought I was compering tonight, didn't you? And he went ooh yes, I'm so sorry Julie, where are you. And I went well I think I'm with Haringey police team. But we're gonna be going to St Anne's Hospital tonight. So I won't be compering your show, sorry about that. Hilary Porter still cracks up laughing about it. Most people when they're mad would try and get out and it'll be a phone call to a solicitor or a phone call for help, you, no, you don't wanna let someone down so you're ringing Joe Bidder going I'm sorry I can't comper tonight, d'you mind taking the show. I'll be back soon, you know.

So there's been times when my own mental health has been to the edges of despair. And there's been times when, really I'd ripped up my own life and started again, you know.

A: Come back a bit. What about that first breakdown. What happened?

J: In Loughborough. Yeah. I was nineteen, I was at Loughborough. I did not know what I was doing there, I was so depressed, um, I didn't know who I was, I couldn't fit in, I couldn't find my place there. And I'd so chosen the wrong place to be. I was adrift without my people; no matter how dysfunctional my family are, I knew where I came from, you know. You look back and you know where you've come from in order to know where you're going to. I looked about me and I saw nothing familiar, I didn't see myself represented anywhere. And the only friend I

had was an indigenous artist from Australia. And um we had a bad falling out, I often wonder what became of her actually, we had a really bad falling out because she called me a guttersnipe. And I hit her and I knocked her out. And um, I'll never forget actually the shame of it. And our head of drama at that time was a brilliant guy, I've forgotten his name. But he eventually died of cancer sadly. But he was bloody brilliant because he took me to one side and he said, took me into his office, he said er, do you drink alcohol at all, I said yes, I said but that has no bearing, I said I hit her, fair and square I hit her, I should never have hit her, I'm sorry.. He said, I have to say she's one of the most difficult women I've ever worked with, and I just want to sit here and have a drink of whisky with you. And he got out these two glasses, and he poured a little bit of whisky in each glass and then he put it back and then he said, I know you've had a really tough time here, and I know too, he said, I thought you were the one that could handle her, I didn't think she'd push every button you have. He said but there must be some satisfaction in having hit the target. And I went well yeah but I wasn't gonna admit that. He said well, I was quite pleased. And I was so shocked at his reaction, because he was literally celebrating the fact that I had hit this woman. And I said well what's gonna happen now, and he said well I'm afraid he said you're now know as Henry Cooper in the staff team and I said oh well I'm gonna have to, it's gonna take me a while to live that down, he said look, it is not the way to behave, you're gonna have to publicly apologise, he said I have to present an argument to the Dean to keep you and I said I don't need to do that, I don't want to be here.

So that was the beginning of my unravelling really. I was absolutely at the end of my tether and I didn't know how to get out of there. Or how to step forward and where to go. Um and I was sent to see Occupational Health Team by him, because he said I think you're getting very depressed and he said you are very high-wound and he said and you don't strike me as somebody who would hit out, and I said well not usually, I can get angry but I don't usually hit out. Anyway me and this girl never spoke again, which was a bloody shame because she was such a laugh. Chrissy, her name was. Anyway I was sent to Occupational Health Team and they said we're sending you to see a psychiatrist. And they were very worried about my mental health. And then I just started unravelling because I wasn't sleeping, and I was really profoundly depressed. And I couldn't see my way out of there at all. And everybody else was having a great time and having sex and finding lots of different partners and all that. But I wasn't, I was just lost. And trying to find my way through this bloody awful maze. And I was so lonely, so lonely. So um, going mad was a really good option and actually it had some really good spin-offs because I met Mike Devenny, who became a really good mate, who called me a fucking nutter and I called him spaz. One of the first things he did was take me to the old Trip To Jerusalem. And I remember the first night we were out, and some woman came round rattling a can for the spastics society. And he went uh guh, and I went here you are, he's here. Take him, he's here. And this woman was so mortified, she literally could not deal with someone with cerebral palsy. And there she was rattling around with a can.

So I mean, we just had great fun being mischievous everywhere we went. And er, so there were spin-offs about being a patient. And I guess I came from such a difficult family, at least I had somewhere to talk about it. I became really popular in the student bar because I had

interesting drugs for sale, because I sold most of my prescription drugs. I hitched to Rome to see the Pope, to see if the Pope could absolve me. And I went to the Vatican and he was out. Took me three days to hitch to Rome. And I took a mate of mine, but she had the presence of mind to stop for a sleeping bag and a pair of knickers. I didn't stop. I had the clothes I stood up in, I had nothing, I was filthy, I had nothing to sleep in, she wouldn't let me share her sleeping bag. Yeah, fifty quid and a passport, that's all I had. But we hitched all the way to Rome. That was one of the funniest journeys of my life. And also one of the most dangerous. It was like a hero's journey. We were in constant scrapes. Um. And I learned very swiftly that men were predators and that that drive they had, particularly in their early years, was basically to nail the most vulnerable woman they could and screw her. So I had to protect the person I was with because she was much younger than me. And um, so we went on this crazy journey to see the Pope who was probably out kissing airports across the world. And then we came back. And was put in hospital for a while. Um. I'm not sure that was the right place for me but (...) That was an interesting place.

And then I was kind of in and out of various clinics. And er, trying to make sense of the past and the present and trying to think about what was the future gonna look like. That was largely why I chose to train as a drama therapist, cause nobody's gonna do that to me again, mate. I'm gonna find out how you did it. And it ends up giving me useful tools. And it also meant that when I first off left Harperbury Hospital, I responded to an advert in City Limits magazine, which just split into City Limits and Time Out. And there was all these adverts in the back. And they were looking for 'a young person to join a team in a therapeutic community'. Somebody with skills in creative arts. And somebody who could look after children. And it would be somebody who was familiar with living away from home. So I thought, that's me. So I end up joining this team of twelve people setting up a therapeutic community out in Greece, on an island called Skyros. I worked for Skyros for twenty-six years. But that first few years, I set up all the activities for the children. I looked after two children in particular, which was the owners' little, founders', children. Henri and Chloe. And then every time we had a session, I would be the one doing all the drama games or arts games, whatever. Creating these mischievous journeys across the island, getting kids into a lot of trouble with their parents, really. I loved it.

It was a fabulous place to go wild on an island, you know. And I found a way to make peace with myself. But there were some quite big struggles along the way. Mostly around getting acceptance from my family and my own communities, I say plural because Catholic, Protestant, different factions in the family, around being a lesbian or um bisexual. Or even refusing to marry or not being interested. Or, you know there were all sorts of things like, they were all so disappointed when I left university, so disappointed. I remember me father writing to me and saying he longed to have my photo in a cap and gown on his television set. And that really touched me for a while, and I ended up crying about it. And then I sat and thought about it, I thought how bloody selfish! I was having hell on earth at that place, where I just got utterly lost. You want a picture of me in a cap and gown on your telly. You don't even have a television. And I started thinking about where he lived and I thought, he hasn't lived in his

own home for god knows how long. Him and me mum split up when I was twelve and a half, because he was very violent. And drunk. And mad. And um, and two lasting things I remember about them being together, I mean when they were good they were very very good, when they were bad they were horrid. It's like the girl with the curl. But I remember on a Thursday night when he came home finally from the pub, because it was pay day probably, he would suddenly slump on the floor, pretend to have a heart attack and he'd do it in more and more dramatic ways. And every time it used to freak me out because I'd think he was dead. Or dying.

And I think because we were removed when we were kids, he always got a big reaction, because we were so, me and my older sister Den, were so insecure that the possibility of him dying was very, very frightening. And he used to play with our reaction. Every time. It was a mind-fuck. And erm, and he was in cahoots with Uncle Morris. Whatever went on, and I will never know what went on, I knew me mum was sleeping with him at some point, but I also knew he raped her, because money changed hands between my father and Morris. And I was there at the park to see it. It was in a park in Chester. And I had hold of Mel's hand, that's the younger sister. And I thought why would you give him money. Morris gave my father moeny. Why would you give him all that money, what's that for? And afterwards my father couldn't look me in the eye.

But anyway, when they parted company, we went to live with me mum's mum for a while. Me dad went to live with his mum, supposedly for a while, but he never left her. In fact what he did, he'd dredged a boat up from the bottom of the Mersey, (..) an old lifeboat up. And he cleared it with the licensing that it was no longer, um, Royal National Lifeboat, RNLM?

A: RNLI.

J: RNLI. So he cleared the license with them. Because once it had sunk you can't use it for a lifeboat. It's a bit like falling off a bicycle and cracking your crash hat. Er anyway, he built that boat, he dragged it home, put it in dry dock, put it next to the house we were in, me mother went spare because all the neighbours complained because it stank of the bottom of the Mersey. He spent two years building himself a little fishing boat. And he called it Dajum. Everyone thought it was an Indian name, it was after his three surviving girls, Denise and Julie and Melissa. The Dajum, as it became know, everyone said it had sailed to India and found its way to Liverpool. So when they split up he went off on his boat. And he went and lived on it. And that's where he lived on the summer months. So, when I was a kid, given that he still thought of me as the boy in the family and the one that was gonna do it for him and sort him out, I learned to scull, I learnt to use oars, I learnt to row, I learnt to work a marine engine, I leant starboard, port, bow, stern. I learnt the way around the boat very very swiftly.

The only thing was, I remember my mates at school thought it was great that we lived on a boat and wanted to come and play and wanted to come for visits and all this. And of course me dad said yes, there was one or two particular people, they were allowed to come. But their parents

got involved and said no, you can't go on the boat without a life-jacket. And I went what, a life-jacket? So I said to me dad, what's a life-jacket. And he went, you don't want one of them. Sure you don't swim anyway. Have you got a life-jacket? He went no. Has Uncle Jimmy got a life-jacket? Jim was on the boats as well. No, why would he have a life-jacket. I said, well Jane's dad keeps saying you might drown. He said, well we don't swim anyway, so we're gonna drown quicker, so I wouldn't worry. And that's the way I learnt to swim by the way, he threw me out of the bow of the boat, Pyool!, into the Mersey. And then kept going, so I had to swim after him, had to learn to swim fast. That was one way of learning to swim.

Are you bored yet?

A: No, no, no, no.

J: Well.

J: You took me back to the first breakdown. That was when I was nineteen. What d'you wanna hear about, treatment?

A: I dunno. Have you any more to say?

J: Not really, no.. I've given you a description of why. Bit of a bleak years, I suppose. But er I think living alone outside of your own people, even if you don't like your own people is pretty tough, it's ropey. And the only person that I found that I really bonded with was Mike Devenney. And then he gave up his PhD at Nottingham and he went down to London. And he became an Islington councillor, Labour councillor. Um, but he was my people, Mike, vey fond of him. And he was of me. Um, in fact when he wanted children he came to me and asked me if I would carry a child for him. I dunno how that's gonna work, but I'll do it for you. And then he met Polly Vittorini, who's since changed her name to Lucia Vittorini. And er, they kind of became partners, they jumped the broom in the old ways, so I guess it was a civil patnership they chose rather than a heterosexual marriage kind of thing. But um, yeah they were going to have a child. And then it all changed, I don't know what happened, and then Polly said, 'I want Julie to have your child', and it well got messy. So anyway, my tribe distanced themselves if you see what I mean. And then one day I was up in Sainsbury's, Islington. And I thought why is this queue so bloody long. Why is this queue so long? And then I looked at the top and then I thought, oh god it's that guy with cerebral palsy again. I know that guy, oh god look at the way he walks, da diddle dum dum dum. I went, Mike Devenny! He turned around, he went 'Oh, you fucking nutter', I went 'Spaz!'. 'Come and help me pack this bag, they don't know what they're doing up here!' So I got to the top of the queue and I went, oh it's you! So I started packing his bag and he was going, oh people just dodgy here and all that. And he said, I'm so pleased to see you. I'm pleased to see you, he goes you should come for a pint, I said yeah okay.

So anyway, we went to the George, which was just opposite Sainsbury's Islington. And we sat

there catching up and he said I'm running this thing for the BBC at the moment, it's called the Spectrum Committee, he said you'd be brilliant on it. So I said, what's the Spectrum Committee all about? He said well, you know this thing, they've got Mosaic for the Asian Programming Teams, I said yeah (...) Continuing Education are doing the same around disability.

A: Jane Campbell was on that, wasn't she?

J: For a little while. Jane Campbell and Mike Devenny were good mates. They'd actually been to the same school at one point.

A: I was interviewed by the Spectrum Committee, or did some work.

J: Barbara Lisicki was on it, Leslie Child was on it, Mike Bramley was on it, oh god there were loads of people on it.

A: All the old favourites.

J: Yeah.

J: Jane was on it briefly, but then she moved sideways.

A: I remember it, but I can't remember why I remember it.

J: (...)

J: I was with them for about three years. And then, like all good things, they come to an end.

A: Coming back to your career, we'd got as far as St Albans, you were sort of dodging to and fro.

J: Well, to and fro, I mean basically Harperbury Hospital, then Bleak House um er during the summer months I was at Skyros doing this kind of alternative community. And what I learned from there, actually I really used well, I thought because I came back to Hackney and was part of a community of people with learning disabilities, an independently living network. And it was about setting up community for people who were in independent flats, but they needed a meeting once a week, cooking together occasionally, a way to have a friendship group, um, they also needed somebody there as a first port of call, very much the way we ran the community out in Skyros, was basically community meetings, every day actually, creating friendship groups and what have you. And so I was running a sunny funny farm in a Hackney highrise.

That's probably the longest relationship in my life, my relationship to that island. I found a lot of peace there. The island is beautiful, it has the oldest traditions in Greece still alive in Skyros. And I met a tribe of fabulous people. Who'd come from all over the world, you know. Yeah.

So, what happened after St Albans? Oh yeah, I saw an advert for um a research worker down

here in London. And it was attached to Southwark Training Group. And they wanted to set up a nursery because they'd decided they wanted to work with children under five, but also people who train them, people who teach children under five and people who train nursery workers or um carers, because they were working with the whole concept of childcare shapes the future. And it was a training group that they spill out of the GLC, and the whole research funding came from the GLC, and it was about finding people to work with who were gonna challenge the structures of traditional education. And they were gonna work with an equalities structure and integration. And they were passionate about integration around race, culture, sex, gender, sexuality and disability. And they were not so good around class, they were not so good around um religion, I would say, it was probably their worst. Anyway.

So I worked with them for two years. And I bullshit my way into that job, because I've never worked as a researcher before. I read a chapter on statistics the night before I set foot in there. And so my research was flawed, my methods were completely made up on the back of an envelope that I'd carried since reading a chapter the night before the interview. Made the whole bloody thing up myself. And er, however it was to raise funds for a training nursery and the training nursery was to be a model of good practice. So I espoused all of their beliefs around social justice, I was absolutely the right person, thinking and doing the roll-out and action plan around disability and integration, but I was absolutely the wrong person in terms of presenting them with a written argument backed up with statistics and research. I was not a researcher. But neither were they, so they didn't know what they were looking for at the interview. And I had a great time, and once I hit London I thought, okay, I need to be well away from my family, this is far enough away. And so I started to rebuild my life. And um, I worked in adult education institutes, I became a special educational needs lecturer, whatever that is, special educational needs, there are all those labels, I think there still are in the education system. So I remember being sent to classes where people were called MLD. And then saying well haven't you got a name, and er why is this whole classroom called blah blah MLD? Anyway, that's what I did for a while.

A: (..)

J: So yeah, I moved into further education, adult education and em I still worked in Skyros every summer, creating new courses. And it gave me a place to experiment, working with groups, looking at power and abuse of power, um I made some incredible creative networks.

And then I had another breakdown, massive blowout in '94. And er I lost me job in Hackney Adult Education Institute. That was desperate, actually, because I went through a period of a lot of deaths. There were eleven deaths in ten years. And it started with my best friend's younger cousin, who was about to come and live in my house, he was renting a room off me. And he was murdered. And um, it kind of changed everything, actually, it changed my feelings about that house, it changed everything in our lives at that time, but it's just bad luck, a string of deaths, you know. And one was a mate of mine who died of cancer at the age of 28. It was just an extraordinary, this is through my early thirties to early forties, you know that ten

years, eleven deaths was quite extraordinary. And er, and you know we'd just come out of the other side of the eighties, when a lot of gay men were dying of AIDS, and AIDS-related conditions, you know. And I knew people who had died, and my best friend from Skyros, his love of his life had died with AIDS-related condition. So there was all that shock of the eighties kind of thing. But I felt I'd got by that because as a lesbian it didn't impact in the same way. But also um I didn't know anybody that close, even my friend Julian's partner, I wasn't that close to him when he died. So suddenly in the early '90s, there was this whole spate of deaths. Which sent me mad with grief. And so I was working in Hackney Adult Education Institute and I took time out. And first of all I did three weeks in this place called The Arbours, which was a crisis centre. And um it was set up by R.D. Laing and James Burke, Joe Burke sorry, Joseph Burke and R.D. Laing, they were kind of known as the anti-psychiatrists. And you know did all that work around Mary Bell, was it Mary Bell?, do I mean Mary Bell?

A: No you mean..

J: Mary Bell was...

A: Mary Barnes, yeah.

J: Mary Bell actually, I think, murdered two small children. I don't mean her at all. About the age of ten or eleven. Nobody ever looked at her and said, wow, what was your childhood like that you were doing that?

A: Gita Sereny did. She did a big interview with her when she was grown up and had a daughter of her own.

J: Wow. Bless her.

A: She was in a very difficult situation. Victim of abuse.

J: Not surprised.

A: Her mother was basically a prostitute um specialising in sado-masochism.

J: You don't need to know any more do you really?

A: It was a case of a bright kid with something awful going on trying to give a message. The point about all this stuff really is that she wanted to be caught. She wanted sort of, bright enough to do that stuff but not old enough for, worldly enough or whatever to know how to get out, to understand that there are people that she could go to and tell them. Or maybe there weren't then. Child walking into a police station and saying I've been sexually abused. Yes dear.

J: Well all the policemen'd say..

A: (...)

J: Come and see me on Sunday at the such and such church. We have a ring of people who will help you. You're special, we'll bring you into our ring. Which actually happened to one of our story-tellers in the Knitting Circle, you know.

Anyway, Joe Burke, three weeks (earth?). I got a lot of help and I thought oh, this is great, d'you know what, I could go quietly mad here, do a bit of pottery, bit of dancing, interpret me own bonkersness, whatever, music therapy, great! And by then I was well involved with Survivors Speak Out, Joe Bidder and Frank Bangay, Debbie McNamara, um Ali Smith, lots of people who, actually I've remained friends with all of them. So that was my new tribe. And then I got involved in disability arts through Colin Hambrook, who'd invited me to do some workshops, Joe Bidder had asked me to do some writers' workshops, um I'd got involved through Nuala Conlan, who was researcher at the psychiatric department in Hackney, got me interested in um Survivors' Poetry. And I thought oh, this sounds just up my street. And I loved it, absolutely loved it. Apart from the prattish sexism of some of the guys that were around and um, and one of them actually I had to move house from because I was stalked by him. And he was seriously mad. And Joe Bidder said to me, you have to get the police involved, I know too much about this man's history and you just need to take this seriously. Because he wasn't just stalking me, he was threatening me with rape and murder and chop me up in bits and all the rest of it. And er so yeah I had to move house from him. Apart from him, my tribe is disability arts, I'd met my people. And er, I loved Colin, I thought he was brilliant, utterly brilliant. I was scared to death of Diane Pungartnik, who I just thought was the miserablist society. Every time, she had these badges on her and every time I read a badge I'd think I hope that library blows up, and then I'd think I didn't really mean that about that library, d'you know what I mean, she'd wear these badges and I'd think oh, I don't want to support that cause. CND. Cunts of the Nation Disorder. So there were certain people I was, I knew were not my people. And it would never have occurred to me to apply for a job at LDAF until Jeanette Cooperman who I was writing stuff with at the time, because I was part of a women and mental health network and we were writing these academic articles, we were running a newsletter and all the rest of it. And Jeanette Copperman was on that network and she said to me one day I've just seen a brilliant job advertised, it's got your name on it. I went what are you talking about? I said I haven't had a job for years and I don't know what I think about it, cause this is after I'd lost my home and my job and you know, spent four years with nothing (..) And felt like I'd made a complete mess of me life. And she said no, have you heard of LDAF and I said I think they're in the same office as Colin. Well, there's a job going. As the Co-ordinator. And I went they wouldn't want me, I said that's for disabled people. She went have you seen the length of your psychiatric record? And I went, yeah, what you saying? Well, I'm just saying that actually, under the social model of disability, that will disable you for the rest of your life. I mean, a psychiatric record that length, frankly you will never get any equal par with your non-disabled peers in the labour market.

And so I started reading up on it, the social model, thinking about it. And I had this application in me bag for ages. And then I took it home one day and filled it in. And er, and I remember coming, I was invited for interview, I came into the interview and it was Leslie Child, Sian Vasey and Sian Williams. On this interview panel. And I said I think I'd better declare an interest or something, I said I know you all, I said do I need to leave the room? And then come back in or something, can I declare an interest and then leave? And they went, it's not quite like that. And I went yeah but, I said I know you all in different circumstances, you know. Um, anyway, that was 1998 and I ended up working for eight years for LDAF. Set up the London Disability Film Festival in '98, we ran the first one in '99, on May 1st. And it was the day after the bomber, the nail bomb in um The Admiral Duncan in Old Compton Street. And I'll never forget opening out and suddenly feeling very queer and very at risk and in London very aware that people had died last night and here we were at the Lux, opening our planned Disability Film Festival for the first time. And I'd been thinking and thinking about it since I went to Turin in '98, you know. And I remember looking round the room and saying there's a gap in the market, I know we can do our own Disability Film Festival. And I said it in the room and Deb Williams who was working with us on the Consortium for Opportunities for Volunteers said no, you got no budget, you'll never do it. And I went, well I'll just get people to give us (woofs?) I'll get people to charge us later, I said, I bet you we'll get enough people coming in to make money on the ticket, we can pay em afterwards. I'll get people who are interested in film to come and talk to us. I remember coming to you and saying come and be our speaker, sorry we've got no money we can probably pay your bus fare, that's about it.

And that's how we got people involved in the first festival, you know, we had no audio-description, I remember sitting whispering to people on the third row, telling them what I was looking at, not one clue, I think we had two sign language interpreters who'd donated their skills for next to nothing and their hands were worn out, God love em, and their brains were fried. And um and the Lux, of course, the Lux gave us their venue for nothing the first year.

A: Wow.

J: But after two years there they had no money, they couldn't open up. What did that tell you? They probably gave it away too much. I mean, I think it was the first day they gave us for free but thereafter we had to find the money, d'you know what I mean. But for nothing, that first year for that first day. Um. That came out of that visit to Turin and that visit to Turin came out of Chris Ledger's film, Moving From Within. She didn't want to go up and get her award, she was too shy, so she asked me to travel with her to Turin. And I said, you want me to go up and get the award? Which I did. And out of seven of those awards, five were given to our artists from these islands. And they were for artists with experience, they were disabled themselves or one, Ian, I want to call him Ian Paisley, it's not Ian Paisley, it was Ian Piercy from um the group up in Glasgow, people with learning disabilities.

A: Oh, (..) Animations

J: Yeah And um Elvis my Hero and oh there was some brilliant ones from them, one called 'Fish'.

A: I think there was one that was kind of a history of Scotland.

J: That's right. It was great. (imitates) Just brilliant! Love their cartoons. Anyway I realised after that first year we were on to something. And all the time the BFI were watching us. They actually wrote to us and asked us to come in. And, I think, had you done a day with the BFI, or was it Doctor Paul Darke, I think, he'd done a day at the BFI, he was, it was about three years before he set up his film festival at West Midlands.

A: I'd done, quite a long time before that in 1981, um with Steve Dwoskin I ran 'Carry On Cripple'.

J: That was it.

A: The first ever festival of disability and film, that was disability and mainstream film.

J: And then didn't you introduce us to Steven Dworkin?

A: Dwoskin.

J: Dwoskin. Sorry I was just remembering Andrea Dworkin. Steven Dwoskin, because he did 'Pain Is..' and something (..) I think you were the link there. Anyway we went for eight years, it went from a two-day event to a full week with extra activities. And by 2006 we had three and a half thousand visitors from all over the place, including we had 55 representatives internationally on that last festival. But 2006 I had absolutely hit burnout. That was my last year. And we handed over to Lou Birks, to Binks, and Pat Place. And they lasted eighteen months. I think they brought in David Taylor and, I can't remember the other guy.

A: Lou who?

J: Lou Birks, known as Binks. He was a filmmaker. And we had quite a strong board, but then, oh, the appointment was made, I had no part of, Mika Bandini came in who um literally at one of the meetings told the Arts Council she didn't believe in Disability Arts and what on earth were they doing funding disabled people in this context. So she had to go, she went pretty swiftly. And one of the last things she said to me on my going out party was are you familiar with Pat Place, I said yeah, she's been round donkeys' yonks. And she went what on earth am I going to do with her. And I said, whadda you mean? And I honestly didn't know what she meant. And she went, is she capable and I said more than capable, I'd be rather more worried about you. And er, and of course Mika was the weak one in that one. Anyway that festival wasn't gonna run and run. Because funding streams had changed everywhere. We had inroads into um BECTU, we had funding and partnership funding was coming from Channel Four, from Carlton TV, from Sky, BBC what do they call it INSET?, it's like an apprenticeship. So what

we had were people willing to give their skills for nothing, that was the partnership funding we had. We had professional panels, we had people's skills and expertise, we had people who were willing to give placements to people who'd come out of our festivals. Um, there were all sorts of fast-running traffic both ways. We had huge support from Alison Walsh um, who was at Channel Four at the time. Um. Huge support from oh god this guy at the BBC and I've forgotten his name now. Chris Edwards who was at continuing education, Mike Devenny who was still involved, who um was no longer at Spectrum, but was doing different programmes himself at that time and also working as Islington councillor, he stayed involved for a long long time, actually until the year before he died. Very suddenly at the age of forty-seven. Which was a big loss.

So yeah, the film festival was exhausting and exhilarating in , you know, both parts kind of thing. And I'll never forget that opening night on the first festival, and Caglar had printed these programmes he'd had published somewhere. But before they went off to the printers, I discovered what he'd done and I thought oh my god there're all these gaps in the programme. So I filled them with films. Didn't talk to him about it. Don't know why he'd put these gaps in the programme. So I put a couple of shorts in, or a talk , all the way through. And when it came back from the printers Caglar went who did this to the programme? I went, well I did, I knew you'd be okay about it cause it's more film and we've got that talk there, we've got this panel here and he went, they were breaks. I went what do you mean, breaks. He went so people can drink coffee or eat or talk to each other. And I went oh my god, oh yeah. I didn't have a concept that people need breaks, they need looking after, you have to feed people, you have to make sure they have a coffee, they might need to step out and take medication. 'D'you mind if (..) fresh air?' And I'll never forget Mandy Coleran who was sat on the front, and I think you had just completed, you were doing a, this beautiful kind of overview of your favourite films, I remember seeing John Doe in the context of it, you know.

A: Was that the madness one?

J: Yeah. And you were doing a talk about that..

A: 'I'm mad as hell and I'm not gonna take it any more'.

J: Right.

A: I swear if he'd said that one more time, you'd have had the whole audience out on the street building the barricades.

J: Mandy Coleran pipes up at the end, 'Erm Julie, are we ever gonna get a break, like?. You know some of us need to eat.' And I went oh Mand, well, there's just one more short. 'Well maybe some of us just need a break.' Okay Mand, okay. So I looked around the audience and I went would everyone like a break? And they were like, Oh Please! But it was amazing how much goodwill was in the room. I'd met my people. That was just beautiful, that moment

looking round, you know. And the first feature film, or it was a feature-length documentary that we showed, we got a standing and sitting ovation.. It was for 'My One-Legged Dream Lover', with Cath Duncan. That was the first time I met Cath Duncan, not in the flesh, but she was on screen. And we remained buddies for ever after. Yeah. Anyway I've run out of steam, can't speak any more. I'm bored of me own life.

A: That's fine.

Part two

Um I was always interested in story telling and telling other people's stories. And I think that was a great gift given to me by my mother's mother, Greta Minto, who was an extraordinary storyteller and collected photographs in these great square biscuit tins. I used to sit at her hem and just listen to her spinning yarns about everybody in these pictures. And she would tell the same stories over and over but there would always be some new feature or some new quirk of the characters inside these pictures. And I used to love to listen to her. So I guess that's where it began.

I wrote my first play when I was fourteen and that was in a Merseyside drama festival. And looking back it was quite an unusual subject matter for somebody of that age really, because it was about a meeting on a street corner in Liverpool near the Punch and Judy café which was right underneath Lime Street station at the time. And the meeting was between Malcolm X and Bessie Braddock. Bessie Braddock who was a Labour member of the Liverpool council who was very concerned about the quality of the British eggs and the safety standard of eggs and all the rest of it. She was a precursor really, wasn't she, to Edwina Curry or Eggwina Curry as she was known. But Malcolm X I was passionately interested in at the age of fourteen. And so I wrote this play called 'Sensing Freedom' and it was this imagined conversation in the Punch and Judy caff between Malcolm X who'd just arrived in Liverpool and Bessie Braddock who was just finishing her egg. And em I just got involved in theatre through a brilliant drama teacher called June Lancelyn Green. I think I was a bright kid but I had too much energy. I was a bored kid at school, and so I was always trouble. And I was always *in* trouble.

A: You told me the story about how she took you back..

J: Yeah she took me back to her house. She introduced me to scripts.

A: And you felt sorry for her.

J: I did feel sorry for her. She couldn't afford lino, never mind carpets. And I left 50p on the table for her. Because I thought she couldn't afford heating either, because she gave me this cold soup which I now know was probably vichyssoise or gazpacho. At the time I just thought oh you poor sod, you can't even feed a meter. So left 50p for her. She was brilliant. And the first play she gave me to read was 'Othello', which I fell in love with. It's the first time I'd heard these clamour of voices on the page. Anyway, so not long after that I wrote 'Sensing Freedom', based in the Punch and Judy café. And at the same time I was selling ice cream outside Lime Street station. And that was very much like street theatre. And er everybody had their own call to sell their goodies, whatever stall they were running, you know. I remember Vi next door, 'Come on girls, don't be shy, get your knickers off Auntie Vi'. All sorts. And Charlotte who sold the flowers right opposite. Anyway. So I used to write these little ditties when I was selling ice cream.

I carried on in theatre, I got actor of the year award in 1977, and then I got involved in theatre

when I was at art college, cause I went to art college first off. And I was involved with a theatre company in Wrexham. And then I made the biggest, stupidest mistake of me life, I went to low-brow, I'm sorry Loughborough. They did have a company called Lowbrow Theatre. And I joined Lowbrow at Loughborough University, but that university was just hell on earth. And I had a breakdown. So I became a psychiatric patient when I was about twenty and um I went with Lowbrow theatre company up to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and er, I was very involved with various different plays that we did that year, um 'Queen Victoria's Sisters' and 'The Legend of the Pole Star', in which I played the king, I think I'm still playing the king now.

And then I transferred from Loughborough to Nottingham, Trent Polytechnic, I had a much better time there. And I was still writing me own plays. And I transferred on to a course that was basically, it was called Creative Arts, but it was art and drama and I got very involved in reminiscence theatre. I didn't really want to spend my life inside an institution, whether that was a university or a psychiatric hospital, they're much the same. So I would spend time in residential care homes nearby and gather people's stories and would write the setting around those stories and feed them back to them on stage kind of thing and invite them to step in and advise us on the fashion of the hair we'd chosen or the costumes we'd be using. And did we have the stories right. And was the music right and all the rest of it. People really woke up to it, it was lovely, I loved doing that. And I was advised by a brilliant guy called Bazz Kershaw, who run a theatre company called Fair Old Times, and so I got quite involved with him as my advisor, d'you know what I mean?

And I wrote a number of plays that went to Edinburgh, 'Venus and the Fly Trap', which did really well, actually, around Nottingham, 'Cock and Bull Stories', I can't remember them all but I think my favourite was 'Venus and the Fly Trap', um and just remember we had, I mean it was a feminist play and the fly was played by Colin Evans who was the man that we attracted into the centre of this web. And the web was made out of modern sacking, you know that cloth that you cover the butcher's meat with, which created these great holes and sparse spaces that the light came through. And it was knotted together in this great big spider's web which kind of, as the lights went down, when the audience was all in place, the spiders came out from behind the audience and they dragged this web across the audience's faces, right through the whole auditorium and then crawled up each side and knotted this spider's web up there. And the whole thing was, everybody was in the web. That was great fun to play.

I can't remember the titles of all the plays. 'Kill the Fatted Calf' was an interesting one, in which, I mean that was all about gender play, talk about a precursor to Pig Tales. And it was about how my father had written his disappointment across the landscape of my body, and that I was the prodigal son, destined to be butchered for the family, kill the fatted calf. So there were quite a lot of plays that came before 'Pig Tales'.

And um, and then I got involved with Banner Theatre, which was a socialist theatre company (Gives spelling) It's a socialist theatre company, still going actually, based in Birmingham, near Digbeth. What I loved about them was they were passionately political,. They collected

stories from other people, so it was very much like me grandmother's (training) really. They called it actuality, it was created by a guy called Charles Parker, was it Charles Parker?, they called him Charlie Parker, but that was the saxophonist, wasn't it? Anyway, I was involved at a time when Pete Yates was the musical director there. He was utterly brilliant and encouraged me to write for them as well. So we co-devised this work called 'The Little Red Mole and Other Stories'. And the little red mole was the Socialist Worker's Party basically, we'd go in and interview people for the rag. And we would go into factory floors, we went on the front lines of pickets, we gathered, I remember the nurses' strike, which would have been in 1987 or 88, I think it was the first time nurses had come out on strike. And we went to the picket lines and we gathered people's stories and we'd record with them on our little Marantz recorders. And we would play them out on stage in various kind of, it was like the Wheeltappers and Shunters Social Club, we went to various trade union clubs and um you know social events and that. I remember going to the miners' wives' club in Stoke on Trent, we went to Sutton Coldfield, we went around all of those very kind of left-wing political galas and delivered this work that we'd pulled together. So I loved working with Banner Theatre.

And we toured that piece of work for about eighteen months actually. And then after that I had a quite pronounced mental health issue, so I was sort of in and out of various clinics. And er, I decided I was gonna live in um Harperbury hospital where I was on placement, because some fuckwit of a psychiatrist had told me I was too sensitive for theatre and I should try training as a drama therapist. So I went off and trained as a drama therapist for two years. One of the things that you had to do, I mean I had shitloads of therapy which was cheap I suppose but anyway um for two years I had to be in analysis, I had to be in group therapy and in individual therapy and I learned all about psychiatry and psychology so at least I could piece together what they'd been doing with me in the clinics and I thought nobody's gonna do that to me again now I know what you're playing. I understood the systems of, the power dynamics that would run round a group, the power dynamics between your psychiatrist, your consultant, your nursing team, your crisis management team, and me as a patient. That was really helpful.

I never practised as a drama therapist other than when I was on placement and I went to Harperbury Hospital supposedly for three months but I ended up living there for two years because once I'd set foot in there I realised that actually something I could do that would be of use was refer to everybody's case conferences so that they had some way of practising and rehearsing what they wanted to say about the future of their lives, because it was during the decant years when ironically Margaret Thatcher became an icon of social justice and closed down those big bins. She wanted the money for property development, she wanted the land. But actually, closing those big bins was no bad thing. However there was nothing in place in the community. The resources were people's families. We were literally doing ring around to anybody we could find in the case notes, those case notes that were still in existence, cause they destroyed a lot of the notes and er the two years I was at Harperbury actually changed my life because I realised I could use my own experience as a patient to reach people, people had a much easier way of connecting with me than lots of other staff members who were still into

playing power games around people that, quite frankly, should never have been patients.

People's notes had been doctored, altered if they were in existence and most of them were destroyed, especially for patients who came from wealthy families, especially for patients whose names had been changed to protect the family members out there who'd sexually abused them, women who'd had babies out of wedlock, who were defined as morally degenerate or morally deficient and.. People had been put away for the most spurious of reasons. And they were all encouraged never to talk about the past. So I spent two years there but I did get very depressed. And I was working in a place called SEAC, Social Education and Assessment Centre, which is ironic, really, because I haven't got great social skills, but I was teaching people social skills.

And my drama sessions were literally rehearsing case conferences and encouraging people to feel more confident about speaking out. And particularly encouraging people to choose which friends they would prefer to live with, to have some say in what would happen when they were finally decanted, which was what they called it. And at the end of my time there, I'd reached burnout, I was utterly burnt out. And I saw this advert in City Limits, an old magazine that was a kind of twin sister to Time Out, which was still in existence, but City Limits had these adverts in the back for people looking for work. And somebody had advertised, they were looking for a creative arts therapist to set up a personal development holiday village out in Skyros island. So I thought I can do that. So I ended up going to the sunny funny farm. And I ended up working for Skyros for 26 years, 26 summers, but what that meant was I became a director and, directing those artificial communities, symbolic communities, what ever you want to call them and setting up a project in Tobago and Cambodia, Thailand. I think they went on to do further work in Vietnam and what have you but em I was part of the teams that set those up in, the second one in (Otsitsa?) 1984 and then er I think with, the one in Tobago we set up in 1995. That was great, because I met artists from all round the world. I met some extraordinary humans who were into personal development and I met some equally bonkers humans gathered on those strange spaces and places where um I don't know, creativity meets madness.

I carried on writing plays and I was writing songs as well. Um and then by about '98 I'd had four years without a proper job, you know. I'd worked on the islands every summer but I didn't have a proper job. And I was too scared to go for a proper job because I had this lengthy psychiatric record. And then somebody said to me one day, well have you thought of working for LDAF. And I said, oh I have, I've done some workshops for Colin and I'd done some workshops (...), started the workshops probably in 1990 actually. And er and they said, oh no, they're looking for a co-ordinator for London Disability Arts Forum. Which would have been in about the May 1998. And I only knew of Diane Pungartnik, who I was actually quite frightened of. I thought she was scary and I didn't want to go and work alongside Diane, who had built the Berlin Wall inside the office I remember, separating Colin Hambrook from the rest of the team. I remember thinking this was mad, literally, it was just this wall of piles and folders and tables, um and he would sit in the dark over this Amstrad, this ancient Amstrad machine in the corner.

Anyway, I couldn't see me going up for LDAF at all. And I think they advertised a second time and er, I can't remember who recommended me at the time and said you should go for that job, we think you'd be great at it. And I thought I wonder if they'd accept me.

But I remember who was on the interview panel. And I took one look at them all and I thought well I'd better declare an interest, cause I know you all. Sian Vasey was there, Sian Williams was there, Lesley Child was there and was the fourth one Elspeth Morrison perhaps? Dunno.

A: Almost certainly.

J: Anyway. So four women I knew. I thought I'd better declare an interest, which obviously was ridiculous. I was offered the job. And as they say, history began to unfold. And shortly after that, I mean I'd started working at the beginning of July. Shortly after that, Chris Ledger invited me to come with her to Turin to a film festival. She was too frightened to go up and get her own award for her film, *Moving From Within*.

A: Can we move forward? You've already told me about..

J: So then in 2000, Pat Place was talking to me about her festival which was called Exposure Festival of Disability Arts. And that was based at Jackson's Lane. And she was putting a call out for new playwrights. Well I wasn't a new playwright by any stretch of the imagination but I hadn't written a play for some years. So I said what about born-again playwrights. She said what do you mean? I said well I've been writing plays since I was fourteen but I haven't written for a long time and she went I didn't know you write plays. And I said yeah. So actually what they were looking for at that time was just the treatment, before you wrote the play. So, I can't remember what the theme was, it was something to do with the flawed body, basically or the body imperfect. And so I wrote 'Pig Tales', which was about my father's disappointment written on the landscape of my body. So it was a revisit really of 'Kill the Fatted Calf', but done in a different way. And set around the nursery rhyme 'This Little Piggy Went to Market', which gave us a great structure, five convenient short stories. And um, and part of it was this autobiographical piece about gender confusion, which is what Pig Tales is all about. And long before all of the politics around gender confusion or gender fixity now, you know, I was smashing binary apart, way back then. I wrote my piece in 2000. Finally it hit the stage in early, no 2001 and then it toured for four and a half years internationally, long before it toured this country. Because it was picked up by a psychiatrist called Dr Bernie de Voord, who was working with the Mental Health Commission in New Zealand. So it went from Oval House Theatre, where it did a three week run, straight out to New Zealand. And Philip Patston saw it in New Zealand and booked it for his Giant Leap Festival in 2005. And um and then from there it was picked up for a festival in Sydney.

And so it started doing New Zealand, Australia and it went to Canada and then finally Jo Hammond came to talk to me about what she had seen when she saw it at Jackson's Lane and

she said have you thought about coming to us for funding at the Arts Council? And I said no, I didn't think you'd fund me, why would you fund me. It never occurred to me I could get Arts Council funded. And she said well we have something called an emerging artists award. And I meant what do you mean, you apply for your own award?. I mean the nonsense of it struck me. So in my early forties I got an emerging artists award, which always strikes me as ironic, you know, like you're gonna be emerging for ever, aren't you, especially if you're a disabled artist. And so I then toured Pig Tales from 2007 to 2008. In the interim period I had got a commission from Theatre Workshop in Edinburgh. And that was 2006. And I'd already written the sequel, 'Pig's Sister'. So 'Pig's Sister' went up to Edinburgh.

A: Before we go on to 'Pig's Sister', do you want to describe 'Pig Tales', for people who don't know it at all?

J: So, 'Pig Tales' was about a character called Pig. It's set inside the nursery rhyme 'This Little Piggy Went to Market', five stories gave us a great structure so this little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed at home, this little piggy had roast beef, this little piggy had none, this little piggy went wee wee wee all the way home. And the thread though in the narrative was Pig's experiences set against the psychosis of the Catholic church. And the psychiatric hospital. The confusion between religion and psychiatry has always been a thread though my life. Not least because my father was profoundly Catholic and was read out at the altar and excommunicated from the Catholic Church in Birkenhead, Saint Werbergh's, where we had four of our children baptised last year. And that gave me great joy because I was there and I thought fucking hell, me Dad'd love this. Anyway um, that was about Pig's experiences of both the church and psychiatric system. And what happens to Pig as a character when they hit the streets with that certainty that they're a boy and they're a manchild. And then they hit the streets and they're.. It's about being confronted with other people's assumptions of who you are, and the assumptions they write across your body when they see you and how you present in the world. And I had as a young child dressed in my father's clothes, but even as a tiny kid my father had treated me as his son, he always treated me more seriously than the other girls in our family. Which actually meant I was taken seriously, I had privileges, I was taught how to steer the boat, and how to handle the oars, how to scull, how to deal with the engines, how to drive, I was driving at fourteen. All of those privileges that the others were not offered at all. So Pig Tales was very much about my experience, but it was also about smashing the binary and the idiocy if you like of gender fixity. And the treatment of women and girls inside that ludicrous system, which we're socialised into.

'Pig's Sister' was many many years rolled forward and it's about Pig on respite in a care home in Pig's ageing dotage. And coming across his ancient embittered sister, who was left on a care home when she was an infant and refused to leave. And they sat at either end of this row of chairs in a care home and cornered, I remember Jo, who did the set design, but I've forgotten her surname suddenly, is it Jo Palmer, no I made that up, Jo, oh it's gone to me. Anyway Jo did the set design and you were staring into the corner of this room with a great big TV screen on one side, the remote out of distance, out of reach and these two embittered people at each end

of this row of chairs. And underneath is the dead nurse who's died on duty. And the whole conceit of that play was how these secrets are gradually unveiled as the corpse is rotting between them. And the joy of my life was when I directed that piece. First of all I acted in it, we had um Jessica Higgs directing. And then when it went up to Edinburgh Fringe no sorry after Edinburgh Fringe it went to Liverpool to DaDa Festival and I directed it. So I stepped out of the action and cast two men in the roles of the women. Playing with gender again. And er the joy of my life was directing my half-brother, Michael McNamara, who played Cissie, who is the embittered sister who's been left on the care steps and refused to leave. And er the other joy of my life was conducting Fay Christiansen who played the dead nurse and literally choreographing her rigor mortis. And the beats in the story were like the beats in her body when she had these spasms in her legs, her feet, she wore these ruby-red slippers, which I've still got at home, and she would click her heels at certain times. That was a joy to do, that piece. Anyway, that was Pig's Sister.

But 'Pig Tales' kept touring, even beyond 'Pig's Sister's' existence, because people kept asking for 'Pig Tales'. And it was cheap to tour. It toured out of a suitcase. And so I took Caglar with me rund the world. We did several Australias and New Zealands together.

A: You took..?

J: Caglar

A: Caglar

J: You know Caglar.

A: Yeah, Carry on.,

J: Cause Caglar had done, well Maria Robinson did the visuals, but Caglar did the edit on the visuals. Maria's a brilliant filmmaker and Caglar is a brilliant editor. I could only take one of them with me and it had to be the person who'd edited because he was operating the visuals of every show. So we developed quite a, an intimate working relationship which meant that we started making more and more work together. So a lot of the plays I wrote beyond then I would have Caglar working on the visuals cause I wanted um integrated access as far as possible, so I would create massive soundscapes in the world of the play.

I mean, all in all I think I've written about fifteen plays by now, since 'Pig Tales'. And Vital Exposure began in 2010. We registered the company at the beginning of 2011 and we've produced 'Crossings', 'The Knitting Circle', um 'Let Me Stay', 'The Disappearance of Dorothy Lawrence', 'Blue Pen', 'Voices from the Knitting Circle'. And then I've also written 'It's My Move' for Face Front Theatre, 'Laundry Boy', part of the writing team for Face Front, 'Happy Ever After' which is written from the testimonies of children surviving violence, Oh 'Pullen's Parade', 'Pullen's Party', 'Hold the Hearse', 'Medicine's Monstrous Daughters', actually that's more than

fifteen isn't it. So we produced about ten plays since 2011.

A: Tell me about some individually.

J: Tell me about what sorry?

A: Tell me about some of them individually, one by one. How about Crossings first?

J: Crossings, the money for the draft of Crossings came from DaDaFestival. So the first stage was directed by Karena Johnstone. It's essentially a modern-day Scrooge. A young woman who's heavily pregnant and runs on to Canning Dock and is trying to escape the gang where she's been impregnated by this gang and she's trying to escape the drugs on the front of the docks in Liverpool. And she runs on to a ferryboat and this ferryboat mists off into the middle of the Mersey and transforms into the Zong, which is Liverpool's ship of shame. It is the ship that was at the heart of a scandal, a fraud scandal which actually the ship's doctor who had disposed of 133 enslaved African people on that boat was done for fraud because he tried to claim for losses at sea. He was never done for murder, he was done for fraud. But that was the first time that in a court of law a price was put on a human being's head and 132 people died, but the 133rd person survived. They crawled back up the bow of that ship and got inside the food store where they survived and they hid until they reached dry land. And then they told the tale of what had happened to the other 132 people.

So the conceit I created was that there were three women, three ghosts in that ship, who collide across time and space and they're like the ghosts in a modern-day Scrooge really and they present the young girl who's pregnant with stories from the past, moral dilemmas that challenge and test her, so that in the end she has to fight for the life of her unborn child before she's allowed off that ship. So it's a great moral tale actually, but it's about sexual slavery, it's about forced migration and it tells the real stories that I found on museum walls. So the griot in the story I found in the British Museum, Inzinga was the name I gave the slave who had survived the Zong. Catherine Hegarty was a story I'd found on the walls in Patony Museum, which is a settlers' museum in New Zealand near Paekokeriki. And her story's also told in Te Papa Museum in Wellington. And Shelley's story, the young girl who's pregnant, was from a girl in a gang in Liverpool who spoke of what she'd had to do for thirty quid.

So Crossings toured in three different stages and um went to Decibel on the showcase of the best work in the UK that they were platforming and through the Decibel conference/exhibition/festival I don't know what they called it really but it was an excellent platform for finding new work in the arts. So it was great to be a part of that.

'The Knitting Circle' I think is my strongest piece of work and it's the one I'm probably most proud of. Because that's written from the testimonies of people who survived those long care system, long hospitals and em I'm pleased that three of the women who were in the original knitting circle that I ran, it was a women's group in Harperbury Hospital and you're not allowed

to do anything political there so they insisted I ran a knitting circle even though I can't knit. I've never been able to knit and I've no interest in knitting, d'you know what I mean. But it was one of those activities that was forced upon women patients and seemed to be soothing and therapeutic but actually it was because they could knit things for the hospital shop and so the hospital made money out of them. And you had to be seen to be doing something for the hospital shop. So I ran a knitting circle for about eight to nine months and em I found an old cassette tape in the basement of my flat, I found that in about 2010 and I started listening to it and I thought oh my god they're the women from that knitting circle, I wonder what happened to them. So I started putting feelers out through Survivors Speak Out, through Out of Sight Out of Mind, which is an online community of former patients and, actually mostly former staff, I put feelers out through national MIND, through local MINDs and I put feelers out through the Mental Health Media Foundation, who were gathering testimonies of people who'd survived those bins. I think they've got two hundred hours of testimonies that have been embargoed by the British Museum.. (*Coughs.*) Can you turn it off a minute, please?

J: So I started writing the Knitting Circle in 2011, I went back to the stories on the tape, I, the first scene I wrote actually is probably the funniest scene in the whole play, where they all come in and they look at what seems to everybody else outside the system an identical circle of chairs. No. Everybody knew those chairs intimately. Every scratch, every pick of paint, every mark, they knew whose chair was whose. And er it was a scene I remembered very well when actually I met a former patient called Betty, wonderful woman, who actually came from a very wealthy Jewish family and they had put her away because she'd been sexually abused. So she was put away for bringing shame on the family. And er she was an amazing patient, an amazing human, she managed to keep privacy around her bed and she was the only in-patient I knew who had her own things nobody would touch. She was fastidious and clean but she collected shit. She rolled it up and she kept it in all of her things. So nobody would touch her handbag, her clothes because she had it in her pockets, she knew exactly which shit she'd done where and where it was going to be. And unbeknown to me she took a liking to my knitting bag with all the needles and the patterns in. And so the scene I wrote was the scene about the shit in the bag. Because she took that bag out to the toilet with her, did a shit in it and brought it back and nobody wanted to sit near her, nobody wanted to touch that bag or do knitting on that day. So that's the first scene I wrote in the Knitting Circle.

And the rest of it was from stories that we gathered because I cast six actors who had some knowledge of mental health issues, either their own lived experience or connection with someone in the family or they'd trained. And I matched them up with six former patients and six former members of staff and I sent them off with three questions. Who are you? What are you doing here? And where should you be? And I brought the six actors back into an annexe next to the hospital and um hotseated them with the director and asked them questions and we got the stories out of them. I recorded it. And then what I did was gathered the themes out of all those responses and put those themes that kept coming through the responses into the play and wrote the play from the gathered testimonies. But I ended up with something like seventy-two story-tellers. I was flooded. I didn't realise that people had

never been given an opportunity to talk about what had happened to them, there'd never been any counselling, there'd never been any space to actually tell how it was, what was it like for them and Colin was interviewing me and I can't remember, oh it was for Shape, Shape Arts at the time Colin was interviewing me, then afterwards somebody got in touch because Colin had published something in Disability Arts, I think it was then still a magazine I'm not sure, no maybe it was Disability Arts Online at that point. And somebody got in touch with Colin and said they were trying to reach me. Was I the artist who'd worked in Harperbury Hospital? Anyway the long and short of it was Colin gave them my email and they got in contact with me. And I thought they wanted tickets for 'The Knitting Circle' which was now finished, it was now up and running and it was now on tour. And so they ended up ringing here it must have been, no I was based at People Show Theatre at the time they rang People Show trying to contact me and um David Duchin was in the office and he said to me a very interesting person's been trying to ring you. They're based in Enfield, here's the number.

So I rang them up and this person was a care worker. And she said I've got some people here who'd like to meet you again. And I said oh, are you ringing about 'The Knitting Circle', you know cause she'd asked about that. And I said do you want tickets and she said I don't know what you're talking about she said I want you to meet us in the grounds of Harperbury Hospital, we'd like a reunion with you. And they were three of the original members of the knitting circle. And I thought it had been demolished, so I said well it doesn't exist any more and she said oh yes it does, it's still there in Radlett. And I said didn't they demolish it? I said I thought, I'd literally got a brochure, I said it was finally closed in 2000. I've got a brochure that tells me it's closed. She said no. And you'll be shocked to know there are 63 former patients who still live there.

And so I said wouldn't it be traumatic to meet back there, it was not an easy place to live. I said are you gonna take support for these people. Have you thought about how it might trigger them? Anyway we talked it through and I said okay, I'll come and I'll meet you. I got in touch with Caglar immediately and I said bring your bloody camera. So we went two hours earlier and I talked, I couldn't believe it was still in existence, the only thing they'd changed was they'd brought down the pillars on the front gates so they were smaller. And they'd brought in the perimeter fence so you couldn't see some of the awful big institutionalised lock-in wards. They were kind of behind the perimeter fence, they brought it in narrower. The trees had now grown, you know, because we're talking, Jesus twenty-seven years ago is it? Anyway.

It was extraordinary going back there. And I just said to Caglar just keep filming. And we walked the length of that long, long leafy road which is called Forest Lane. And um, and I was able to say that's the women's wards this side. All the women's wards were on the right as you enter. And all the mens' wards were on the left, because you had to divide people, of course you had to separate the people. God forbid they should snog or have sex or anything. Jubilee Hall, where we had all those ridiculous celebrations, pantomimes, Easter Bonnet parades, oh, you know when the lunatics had to make lively for the League of Friends and the ladies used to come in and visit, you know, from the Women's Institute, that hall was still there.

The ECT unit exactly in the same place, (Dephallas?) Hall. It's weird, so I literally walked him around the whole place and space. And er he just kept on filming. And then the three women who'd been in the knitting circle arrived in a minivan. And we couldn't believe, they, one of them has got so skinny I didn't recognise her because she used to be very plump. And she's great, absolutely great. In fact I went to her eightieth birthday party last year. So we stayed in touch.

But that was great because they literally turned the tables on me and they wanted to interview me and talk to me about their life experiences in there. One of them took one look, she went 'That's Julie! We know 'er she used to give us all the money, didn't she? She used to bring all the money in.' I thought god, that is what I did. Because they had never managed money, and they were about to be decanted into the community I would bring in bags of coins and we'd play shop together, or we'd play banks together. It was all part of rehearsing what would happen when they went out. But I'll never forget, we used to go to the village hall to these craft sales. But they liked the money, they didn't want to give it away, they didn't like the concept of giving it away. So they would pass it across the counter and then take it back again. And take the thing they wanted, whether it was a cake, you know those little fancy cakes, butterfly cakes all that. I'll never forget going to one village hall, and they literally grazed and ate everything in sight. And the woman there said, they don't want to pay for anything, But we do actually have to put something in the till, I said well here's a fiver, that'll cover it won't it, just got out of there fast.

And it was fabulous that they had turned the tables on me and met me in Harperbury, we had a.. extraordinary reunion of all our yesteryears. And we stayed in touch ever since. They then came to see 'The Knitting Circle', they wanted to see the show. And what was wonderful was them just laughing uproariously at these stories they could hear and the characters. I mean I'd changed some of the names apart from the nursing sister who was bloody brilliant, she was a great inspiration, Mary Francis, we kept her name intact as a kind of um an acknowledgement of who she was. She died very young, she died at the age of 53. Which I now think of as young. Interesting.

Anyway, I'm very proud of that piece of work because it was faithful and because it was creative. And because it actually, I mean never mind the fact that it gathered full houses everywhere we went, that's not because it's a pretty brilliant play, it's because people were hearing their own stories at last. They had a sense of completion, of being heard. And, I think it was in 2013, Taoiseach Enda Kenny in the Dàil in Dublin declared a public apology to all the women who'd been put away in Magdalen laundries. We didn't hear anything over here in England, there was no apology for all the lives that were lost, the years, countless years wasted in those systems. And so I began to make a link with the Magdalen laundries and made a public apology at the end of every show. And um, and we finished I think on the 18th of May in 2013, we finished in Bristol and we were at The Brewery, which was part of the Tobacco Factory. And I will never forget we had to turn one minibus away because, they'd come from Cardiff because they were from a particular institution in Cardiff who wanted to come. We

had literally had to reblock the show, We had put an extra two rows of seats in and they were still sitting on the stage in the middle of the bloody set. But we still had to turn one carload away. And I went out there and I was greeting these women and saying I'm so sorry, we can't get you in. We've broken every fire regulation in the book, there is literally no room. If you come in, you're doing the show, you know. That was an amazing night. And at the end of that night, it was my last apology if you like, um and an acknowledgment to all the voices who had delivered and gifted their stories to us as a piece of work. And then I invited people on stage and four people got up and sat on the stage. And one of them, a woman called Rosie, I'll never forget, she was swinging her leg, her feet didn't even hit the floor, swinging her legs and she went thank you so much all of you for coming to hear our play tonight. And the ownership, it still touches me, really touches me because it was their play, it was their stories. And I stayed in touch with Rosie and one of the other women there, they came from a place called Yatton, which was out in West Country. And er, that was a massive bin, you know.

They invited me to Christmas. Not last July, the July before. And I remember thinking Christmas in July, what the fuck? So when I went there I said why're we having Christmas in July and she said why not, we can have Christmas when we want. We don't have to have it when everybody else has it, we have Christmas when we want. And that sense of bending the rules and just joyfully celebrating life has stayed with me. And one of the things that is a common thread through all of those stories was, we've survived to tell the tale. And we will speak the truth, we will be heard. And they would say, it's the love and mischief that got us through. Love and mischief. And you know what, that's what everybody wants really, isn't it? That's what we all want. So um yeah, I'm most proud of that piece of work.

Which is why I, I kept getting asked to take it out. In 2016 I was asked again could I take 'The Knitting Circle' over to some of the Magdalen Laundries survivors in Ireland. And um I'd taken Debbie Francis, who was one of the actors who'd worked in all three stages and her heritage is Indian Irish. Her mother's from Coleraine in the North, I can't remember what part of India her father's from. But she had not spent long in Ireland herself. And I said you're absolutely perfect to bring into Ireland to do this show. I want you to do three monologues, monologue from a former patient, monologue from a former member of staff and a former patient who became a member of staff, who still lives in one of those hospitals. She never got away, but she uses her role to change the system. And um that's what Debbie did, that's what we did between us. And we went to Ireland and we delivered an abridged version of the Knitting Circle and Q and A sessions for the survivors of the Magdalen Laundries who were at that conference there. And er that was 2016.

And it's still gathering momentum as we go. I've been asked to do an edited version for a new festival coming up and I might well go back and re-edit that just for the festival. But I was delighted to have Rachel High interview me and the thread- through of that narrative in 'Voices from the Knitting Circle' is a very well-known actor from Adelaide, Rachel High, who has Down's syndrome. And she does a wonderful job actually, very attentive listener and she decided on the questions she was going to (...) So I'm pleased with that documentary as well. Don't

know what else to tell you about.

I'm very pleased with 'Whisper Me Happy Ever After' which is in its sixth year of touring London schools. And that was created from testimonies of children between nine and twelve who'd survived violence in home or violence in their country of origin. And what that had done to them in terms of the mental health issues they carry. And it's a play that tells their stories but that gives them three possible endings. It's done through forum theatre, so that they can challenge the story and turn it around, so they can stand back in the story at the end and choose how the ending or the outcomes work for them. And they can choose differently than you know, the negative stories they've lived. I'm particularly pleased that that's still doing the rounds. And I'm pleased that we're about to do a tour of 'Medicine's Monstrous Daughters'. The playwright that you saw me talking to earlier on is Omikemi Natacha Bryan. (*Spells for ATS*.) So Omikemi wrote the piece called 'Medicine' and I've written a piece called 'Monstrous Daughters', which has developed out of 'Hold the Hearse', so originally stories that have come from Bethlem Hospital. Omikemi's story had come from the story of Henrietta Lacks who was an African American woman whose cells they used in research and whose daughter they experimented on because she was epileptic, deaf and without speech. And so what we've done is um reflect back to the audience the voices of these monstrous daughters essentially disabled women or disabled girls who have been used and abused in mental health treatments or research across two hundred years. And they've come through medical museums. And that one is about to tour, we start in autumn I think, we're rehearsing in September and then it'll hit the road in October.. We're opening at Stockton Ark. I'm looking forward to that one, I think that's going to be quite a meaty celebration. I wrote a chapter about 'Monstrous Daughters' which was published last year but it was in the Museums Association's tome of wisdom about feminism and activism in museum spaces.

And um, ooh there's another chapter about to be brought out called 'Spectacular Defiance'. Um which will be published by Routledge in a couple of weeks, in January. 'Spectacular Defiance' covers the, the work of activists in museum spaces who've really made an impact on me in terms of the work I write and make. I love the stories because you can do real stories that you find hidden in the archive or the records of museums.

A: So is this a chapter you've written in a book that's coming out?

J: Yeah, yeah the book is called 'Museums and Activism'. And the chapter's called 'Spectacular Defiance'. Um and I've called on my favourite activists um so Lisa Riah Hanna, who's a Maori artist, whose work really impressed me in Tukapa Museum in Wellington. Aidan Shingler who created the StarDisc in the Derbyshire Hills. And you know Aidan's work very well. Um I think the first..

A: People reading this won't necessarily, so..

J: Oh well, the first exhibition of his that we showed at LDAF was 'Only Smarties Have the Answer'. And I loved that. I love his row of bow ties donated by psychiatrists who treated

him. And underneath the careful labels of the drugs industry they're connected to. And each bow tie pinned on to these white frames with a pin with a little red bead like a droplet of blood. I remember it so vividly. And I also remember people being quite frightened of Aidan because at the beginning of the exhibition he was dressed in a white coat and he had a little platter with these orange tablets, they looked like, something like, you know, Benzodiazepines or something scary out of a brown bottle. But actually they were Smarties. And nobody would take them off him apart from Pat Place. I remember she thought 'oh, I'll try one' and she took one and swallowed it, it was great, it was like well she can I can. That was a great exhibition. But I love his work. And I remember seeing his, I've forgotten what he called it, it was a pendulum just about touching this yellow fluid in a conical flask on top of this marble plinth that was in the Wellcome Foundation's um headquarters foyer. And um, you were there actually, talking to Aidan at the time and you said, well what's in the flask finally,. And he said well, it's my urine. And you cracked up laughing and you said so you're taking the piss. And Aidan said yes I am actually. And he talked about why he was taking the piss out of the Wellcome Foundation and the amount of money that they'd put into this project of his, oh I just thought he was so clever. I love his work on StarDisc as well and the fact that his search for the alien beings out there who are gonna collect us star children one day um, he's found his pathway to the stars literally out there in his own kind of um monument, I suppose to people who are positioned as unwell or mentally ill or somehow flawed in terms of their sensibilities and sensitivities, you know. And he's found his own pathway to the stars. He said I can stay in one of those, he's got twelve carefully positioned stone tombs around this circle. Have you been up there, have you seen it?

A: No, I haven't, no.

J: Oh it's amazing, amazing space. Anyway, so the twelve are his star children, he has anointed so far and they're carefully positioned like the tablets on his clock, 'Medication Time'. The other artist that I have referred to in that chapter is Banksy and his work 'Banksy versus the Bristol Museum'. I thought that was superb. And the fact that an artist who has been perceived as um a graffiti artist and a nuisance, painting over civic buildings, urban grime and what have you was suddenly positioned and paid for by taxpayers basically as a great artist worthy of interrupting the membership of the Bristol Museum with the extraordinary collection there. Brilliant stuff, brilliant. Anyway that's where I'm up to with my writing so far.

That's me really.

A: Where would you say you're at overall?

J: Um. Well I've just been awarded a Miegunyah Fellowship, so where I'm at right now is in an extraordinary place um where I'm perhaps better known in international circles than I'll ever be known in the UK. And um the Miegunyah Fellowship has also made me an honorary Fellow of Melbourne University, where I'm going to do a series of lectures um which I've loosely called 'Crippling it Up' because I want to talk about unleashing unruly minds, neuro-diverse minds and

all the non-ruly bodies in um public buildings and academic spaces. Because I'm appalled at the lack of um consideration, thought or even healthy attitudes to welcome disabled students or disabled professors inside academia. I'm just appalled. So I applied for the Miegunyah Fellowship last April and I was amazed I got it when I look at the list of people who've gone before me. They're like eminent professors, they've done all this work on the economics of Indo-Chinese influence in Australia. And then this year it's gonna be Julie Mac doing 'Crippping it Up'. So I'm delighted, but that's what's taking me to Australia for four months, I leave next week..

So that's where I'm at right now is actually I'm starting to break into academic circles. I'm the feral activist, d'you know what I mean? I'm not an academic, I'm not an academic at all.

A: No, me neither.

J: I mean, I'm a workaholioc, I'll give you that. So..

A: It's not necessarily a bad thing to not be an academic. The start of what led to this D4D project was a workshop up in Sheffield, set up by the AHRC, the Arts and Humanities Research Council to bring together academics and people from community backgrounds to create brand new projects. They made it very clear, they said if you've got a project, this isn't the place to bring it to, this is all about creating new projects. But a thing at the start of that was somebody was explaining the process and talked about gving it a title. And she put up on the screen, she said as an example I'll give you the short title of a piece of mine. I couldn't help myself, I said out loud, 'only an academic would call that a short title'. I think it's a long title if it's got two words.

J: Very odd. Very odd world. So where am I at right now? I don't want to be running a company, I never wanted to run a company. I had to run a company because they moved the goalposts. I was an anomaly funded by the Arts Council as an RFI, there was something called Regularly Funded Individual Artists. And I was funded for a few years as an RFI. And then they changed the goalposts in 2010 and said, we want to keep funding you but we can't fund you as an individual artist any more. I said well what do you want me to do. They said well you have to join another company or create your own. And I thought nobody's gonna want me, who's gonna, honestly, who's gonna recruit me, that's not gonna happen. I'm too mouthy, I'm too difficult and I speak the truth too often. And so I felt I'll set up a company. I started thinking about what kind of a company. And the two groups of people I still feel are the most disavowed voices in society are mental health users and people with learning disabilities. And so they are constantly the people whose stories I'm mining and bringing in centre stage and constantly the people I wanna work with actually.

I'm not interested in making it palatable, I'm not interested in making nice you know let's be the national theatre of disability nonsense. Not a damn bit interested. And if they want to take the funding away from me they will. I keep saying it and they haven't yet, I said it in Disability

Arts Online recently. I will unveil some unpalatable truths but they need telling. And er, well the thing I'm playing with at the moment is layering access inside the work before we get it on stage, because I'm sick and tired of seeing really dodgy aesthetics with access plonked on somehow, some uncomfortable clunky sign language in dialogue mirrored on stage and then I think what ever happened to the access aesthetics? So I'm exploring that at the moment through a whole project called 'Trouble with Access'. And I started in RT&D here actually, next door in Empire Two with Laughlan Philpott. He's now head of Playwriting Australia. And he writes with a narrative voice at the heart of his work. And it's almost like audio description. So in our R&D here, I mean I knew Laughlan was doing some conservatoire work in Paris and was working with, his director is Alison Campbell, they've worked together for twenty years. She was in Ireland, he was in Paris, so I invited them both here, I got cheap tickets because they both live in Australia. Got them over here, we had two blind actors, Amelia Carvello and Karina Jones, you probably remember she did the freak show with Multimedia Fittings um and she's done a series of beautiful pieces with Graeae in the past, Hijinx, all sorts. And so it was great having blind actors with Laughlan's work and we had Louise Friar, who's an excellent audio describer and has you know researched around audio description, she worked with us as well. We had Steven Collins, deaf actor, cause I wanted to see, well if we used Laughlan's work and we have his text with audio description at the heart of the work in that narrative voice, what does that do to the work when we include a deaf artist with sign language interpretation. Do we have to change the signing, do we have to change the timing of the writing. Because, you know there's a classic show don't tell which is about theatre, which actually the physicality of sign language works well with. But if you've got a narrative voice that describes what you're seeing and then you've got the sign language literally translating that, they're gonna show and tell you in advance, and that ruins the dramaturgical beats in the narrative of the arc, d'you know what I mean?

A: Yeah.

J: So er, we've been playing with that, timing, narrative voice, um what happens if we, I mean we tried two things, we tried a number of things actually but the two things we landed on was what would happen if you changed the physicality of the sign language but you give enough information for the deaf audience to know there is a secret coming, there is something coming. So you don't do the reveal too soon. We also worked with line feeders, so you can hear the feeders literally telling the line and then the blind actors telling the line. So you have this kind of ghosting, shadowing experience, it was just beautiful. Loved it! So it was a whole new form if you like, I've never seen that or heard that before and I'm gonna play with that a bit more out in Australia with an extraordinary team I'm gonna be working with.

A: Brilliant!

J: Yeah. Looking forward. So that's where I'm at right now. And hoping that gradually I'm pulling out of Vital Exposure and leaving it in the hands of our fabulous team that we've got now. It's pretty rock-solid.

A: Good. Well done.

J: Yeah, I'm pleased. And hopefully it'll attract younger blood. Younger voices.

A: Making something work is one thing, but leaving behind something, something that's solid and will go on is another..

J: It's a whole other thing. I think the mistake we made with the Disability Film Festival was not having a solid enough board. And I was not involved in recruiting the new people coming in. And I think we should have been, me and Caglar should have been on the recruitment panel. And we made that terrible mistake and so the new people that took over the film festival lasted twelve months and then it was dead and dusted. Bloody shame. I tell a lie, it wasn't twelve months, it was eighteen months later it died. And we were doing well with the partnership we had at BFI, you know. We had a week-long festival with over three thousand participants coming. Bloody shame. C'est la vie.

A: Heigh-ho.

J: Shit happens innit? Yeah.

(Break.)

J: There you go.

So going back to 2004, um, no 2003 she had seen 'Pig Tales', 2004 she picked up on it and took it to Good Health Wanganui, which is a psychiatric hospital in Wanganui. And that's out in New Zealand. It was an amazing conference. And it was called 'Making a Difference' and it was looking at gender under the microscope of the psychiatric system. At that time it was when Georgina Boyce who was the first trans-gendered woman was a Maori politician had just been voted in to parliament. And so there was a huge audience from Maori communities and they came out to celebrate 'Pig Tales', that this had hit the road and they were in full support of Georgina. They have a completely different understanding of gender, it isn't completely binary. So that was quite a revelation. And then Philip Patston took it to Giant Leap which you know.

A: I think we'll stop there.

Ends

