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*Interviewer*

Interviewee

*[Microphone shuffling] okay so er first of all can you just tell me your full name please?*

It’s Paul White

*And can you spell that?*

Er White

*White?*

Like the colour

*Yeah w-h-i-t-e for some reason we just have to spell even if it’s a completely obvious thing we just spell it all in case the person who’s transcribing doesn’t speak English or something [laughs] well that obviously wouldn’t happen but yeah er and can you tell me your date of birth?*

14th of August 1978

*Brilliant, okay so to start with maybe can you just tell me a little bit about your parents?*

My parents? Erm…Joanna Ford and Richard White erm both of them from sort of East London way Chingford and Barkingside originally erm neither of them live in London anymore my parents erm they got married in seventy seven and divorced in eighty seven I think it was erm my Father was oh until he retired a underground train driver erm he did that for his entire working life minus a couple of years in his late teens. He was apprenticed as a guard in when he was fifteen erm moved up to be a driver and stayed a driver for the rest of er rest of his career. Erm my mum was a housewife I suppose erm who about the sort of time my parents got divorced she went back and studied erm worked her way up to having a Masters in Psychology erm and since then did little bit of all sorts of stuff. She’s done academic research and she ran a family support project in in Lincolnshire were she moved to fifteen years ago now she’s retired aswell [chair squeaking] erm lets have a look my dad’s from a very big East London family he’s the second of seven eight I could probably count them all erm we’re all fairly well estranged in our family these days. We kinda saw a lot of each when we were young so I’ve got many many uncles and aunts and cousins erm including numerous cousins I’ve never actually met erm so on and of course spread out across the United Kingdom and Ireland these days. Erm my mum is one of three erm her sister her younger sister actually used to live in a house around the back here erm on St Marys Rd and so I know this little bit very well because erm my cousins lived there er they were close when we were kids.

*Hmm*

Erm not sure what else I can tell you really

*So where where your parents living when you came along?*

Oh well erm that was Gants Hill cheers about sort a mile a mile and a half from here erm when they bought a house there when they got married or just before they got married erm and I lived there throughout my entire life until moving out at eighteen erm my Mother moved out of London all together maybe twelve thirteen years ago and now is in Lincolnshire so you know I had eighteen years in Redbridge erm and sort lived around the area as well for another sort of five or six so

*Hmm okay so can you erm can you tell me what your kind of earliest memory is of living in this area? [microphone banging]*

Erm that’s quite a good question erm I suppose for Ilford in particular a very early memory I’ve got is it must have been maybe sort of nine and I’d er taken my younger brother to Ilford to go to the shops which meant walking through the park erm and this before this actually before the big shopping was there now and I was at WHSmith on the High Rd were the shopping centre is now and erm at some point in that shop I lost my little brother which was obviously not a very good thing so I went off to where we agreed to meet if we got separated and I waited there for a very very very long time getting more and more upset erm until my grandma finally showed and what had happened was my brother had gone home on his own and everyone was ‘where’s Paul?’ and er after a little while he said XXX she was the only one who had a car so she could drive up to Ilford [laughing]

*Oh no*

And erm come and find and I was just standing there absolutely er you know mortified

*Yeah*

[Laughs]

*How old were you?*

I was probably about nine

*And how old would your brother would have been?*

Six

*[Gasps] scary so he managed to find his way home by himself?*

He’s always been like that [laughs] he used to go out on the something to do he’d just buy a travel card and go out on the buses and what not [laughs]

*Wow*

Yeah he went he oh he went all over London god knows I mean it was erm they’re were quite a lot of difficult time when were young and we were kind of a sort of semi feral really erm my mum was very depressed and my dad even before they got divorced worked shifts so we only ever saw him for a few hours

*Hmm*

You know every third week or so and so yeah we kind of left we wanted a lot of the time and so from a certain age once you’ve kind come come up here all the time you know I guess because we did have mobiles or anything like that then you just kinda got on with it you know and my dad when he was a child would play bombsites and you know [laughs] bunk a train to erm Southend and what not so they didn’t really think much of cycling to Ilford

*Hmm*

It wasn’t a scary prospect

*And so what did that what did that mean to you? What was your childhood like?*

Erm [squeaking chair] well at the time it seemed fairly normal I guess erm but didn’t have a lot to compare it to I had kind of looking back on it now I sort of I struggle to see our childhood as anything more sort of the cycling project sort of three generations of dysfunction so [laughs] you know my both my parents very sort of disturbed…depressed damaged by their own upbringings ermmm and the same goes for at least three if not all four of my grandparents all kind of XXXX violent of neglectful or you know otherwise traumatic upbringings and it just kind of cycled down you know my dad kept his emotions and feelings so far close inside of him erm as a result of his upbringing erm you know both of my grandparents completely separately were in Claybury Asylum probably around the same time bizarrely erm…

*Where’s that?*

Er it’s not there anymore it was er Claybury is down towards Woodford

*Okay*

And there was one of the… there used to be a big ring of mental hospitals around London maybe twelve or thirteen of them and they were all closed up in the eighties erm under sort of sold off for development and stuff so they’re not there anymore but yeah

*So which which of your grandparents?*

Both of them

*On…*

Sorry both of my grandfathers on…

*…On both sides*

Yeah so both of them about the same sort of time would have been in erm you know in hospital for depression anxiety stuff like that so [slurps drink] erm both of my parents grew up in…environments that weren’t really conducive to sort of happy lives I guess

*Hmm*

Erm which is very sad

*Yeah*

Sad indeed erm but you know my childhood was sort of seemed normal enough you know erm that was kind of a emotionally a little bit sort of rough shot my mum was very depressed, I don’t think she would even admit it now really erm my dad was you know just just didn’t want to…not really there erm and being quite a large family always loads and loads of kids around and stuff like that and so we just sort of got on with it really didn’t you know sort of poor but not on the breadline at the time and you know it all seemed fairly normal

*Where you aware of your parents erm emotional kind of states?*

No not at all

*No?*

Not at all I mean they just just our parents that’s just how it was erm it wasn’t until much much later when looking back on things and you know with an adult perspective that everything seemed you know that’s er you know when my parents split up my mum became very very very depressed for a few years and that was sort of a period of quite we’re quite feral and we had very very little money but you know we were just living off of child benefit and

*You were living with you mother at that time?*

Yes yeah

*When when they [inaudible]*

Yes my dad kind of was being an arsehole about maintenance and things like that erm so we didn’t have a lot of money until erm things started to pick up and my mum had finished her studying and what not…erm you know kind of yeah grew up in sort of physical poverty I guess around my sort of early adolescence erm and yeah

*What was the house you were living in like? Where where where you living when your parents separated? Do do do you stay in the house you were living in when your dad left?*

Yes we did yes my dad moved out and lived er lived in a succession kind of first of all depressing like bedsits and he moved in with various of his siblings for a little while erm. We kind of moved around a bit until buying a flat in XXXX. Erm so we stayed in er the family home as it where which is erm Gnats Hill quite a nice nice house you know back in the days when a young married couple could afford to buy a three-bedroomed terraced house in only zone four [laughs] it’s just phenomenal to think of now that you know they borrowed a little bit of money from my grandad and and er that was why they got married because erm my grandad my dad’s father insisted they married so if my dad had an accident and died my mum would be liable for the money they the money they borrowed off of him.

*[Sighs]*

So that’s that’s my father’s father and that’s basically the story that some him up most of all erm [drinks] so yeah we stayed there and erm in the house gradually sort of fell apart around us because nobody was very good at looking after the place, my mum was quite depressed and was she didn’t really believe in the whole housewife thing anyway erm so and we sort of [laughs] it was like the embarrassing house on the street you know [laughs] lots of furniture in the front garden and paint peeling and things like that erm er

*And did you find it did you find it embarrassing?*

I didn’t my erm I’ve got two brothers the middle one Dave who’s the one who loves travelling he didn’t bring and friends back at all erm I look back now and I realise he was you know very embarrassed about the way he lived and erm he spent a lot of time emotional effort on not replicating that which is very good you know he’s done very well erm my myself I didn’t really care whether this kind of didn’t bother me you know [laughs] I couldn’t understand why people lived in nice clean houses anyway [laughs] so you know it was alright we had loads…if you’ve got loads of children and dogs and cats and god knows what else running around the place you could either sort of choose to spend you entire life running around everything trying to thing clean or you can just say well you know do it as and when erm you know some of friends took the piss but most of them were it was very er hands off parenting so as I got older my house was sort of the place where everybody came around after school to smoke weed and drink larger erm my mum just kind of rolled her eyes and what so it was that sort of environment you know

*But it was your house people would go to because that’s where it was allowed*

Yeah because it was you know liberal and you know erm and I kind of realise now my mum kind of felt helpless about it you know she was trying to be a cool parent of anything like that she just didn’t really know what to do about it she didn’t want to drive me away through you know excessive sort of discipline and you know never encouraged towards discipline at all erm I guess I guess my mum didn’t really have much self-discipline herself she never had been encouraged to do anything until you know she was kind of parents were like don’t bother going to school there no point you know and er so she was like didn’t really have a lot of self-belief you know

*Erm*

And that sort of went into her parenting a lot of erm but at the time it seemed cool like ‘yeah’ it was nice to have people around and what not and er have my mum as the cool parent but later on I kind of realised now it was very unhealthy for me it was very unhealthy for her and you know didn’t help either of about sort various mental health stuff so…that’s kind of [chair squeaking] I guess I’ve started losing my trail a little bit now so [laughs]

*It’s alright erm you were you were also just saying about your there were three three brothers*

Yes two brothers I’ve got

*Is that…so you had three in total including you?*

Yeah

*And your oldest?*

Yup

*And then there’s?*

There’s my my brother Dave

*Dave*

He’s three years younger than me and my brother Mike is three years younger than him

*Okay*

So erm you know not amazingly close but we are friends if you know what I mean

*Hmm*

We don’t sort of hang out but we get on when we do see each other

*Hmm*

Erm once a year [laughs] for a get together and that’s you know I that’s just kind of how its ended up really it was sort of it was quite a traumatic upbringing…once you get kind of past it and I think erm I guess once of the things we’ve learnt is sort of hands off relationships with each other erm my dad’s side of the family are very hands on and what that’s meant is that they all hate each other because nobody can stay out of each other’s business erm so my dad has no longer speaks to any of his siblings and there was another another brother out of the eight or nine who no longer disappeared he and his family just moved and left no forwarding address no forwarding telephone number and he went in the nineties and one of my dad’s sisters has been ostracised by everybody because she’s mentally ill and recently I heard that another one is now ostracised by everybody who’s left I don’t I think there’s only four of them left who still talk to each other for apparently being like doing something awful to their mum so you know family is over the last sort of fifty years gradually exploded

*Hmm*

Because nobody can keep their face out of anybody’s else’s business

*So that’s been something you’ve tried not to…*

[Puts down cup] I’ve observed from a distance erm I because the family is quite well spread out and my parents divorced I saw less and less of his side of the family erm and when I did see them we didn’t always get on very well erm many of them are have [laughs] quite significant differences to me let’s say er

*Do you want to say any more about that?*

Well [laughs] you know a couple of XXXX are quite right wing and erm I am quite left wing and that doesn’t really bode very well very good sort of family catch ups it’s a little better now when we see people. I think who knows and it’s a bit different sort of having an argument with a growing man as it is to having an argument with an eighteen year old

*Hmm*

You know and I I age has mellowed some people and many of the others so you’ve they’ve just gone there not you know not part of the family anymore, so that’s the sort of environment my dad grew up in erm his her he’s got a younger erm couple of siblings who were put into a orphanage one time when my erm grandparents couldn’t afford to keep them anymore so they dropped two of their kids off at an orphanage and went away for six months and then came back one day and picked them up because they had more money and that was it there were no discussion there was no visiting there was no nothing erm to me that seems like a horrendously abusive thing to do you know way way above the sort of the very typical of the time like physical beatings and what not that went on just emotional neglect and I never really understood why they had so many children I mean they didn’t seem to particularly like them so much you know erm…we’ll never find out erm yeah so you know that’s that’s the sort of family dynamic and I guess that erm some people done better than others out of it…and it had its effect on my parents and on myself and my brothers

*And and back to you and your childhood*

Hmm

*What was erm what was your school time like? Where you did you go to school locally?*

Well I went I liked school when I was like to er junior school erm I wasfairly bright erm and there was a sort of I guess there was a sort of feeling amongst my family you know that I was quite a bright child and I was going to do very well and so I just kind of you know I was sort one of the better one in the school and was years ahead in reading and stuff like that so its kinds of a bit of a breeze really…I got plenty of praise and you know and would often be sent to go and read and study in the library on my own or with the other clever kids so that the teacher could spend more time with the kids who weren’t ahead and that was nice you could go and read read whatever you wanted to read and things like that erm so I enjoyed that but erm

*Erm*

Oh

*Just to let you know I’ve just noticed the battery is gone down very quickly so erm I am just going to pause this*

Yeah

[Microphone shuffling]

*Okay*

Right yes

*Continuation*

So yeah

*Yeah*

Yeah infant and junior school was all very good you know I was happy enough erm I enjoyed it I don’t remember having any sort of significant bad experiences at school but then at secondary school I hated erm I I was there for seven years in the end and I probably hated every minute of it erm I you know struggled to make friend in the first couple of years and was bullied not sort of terribly I know people who went through much much worse but you know I kind of delicate little soul me and I took it all to heart and erm I I just hated it I hated all the kids I hated the bloody teachers for the most part erm I was kind of in a lot of lessons I was sort of marked out as a bit of a trouble maker but I wasn’t all I was just miles away day dreaming you know erm I used to love English was my subject when I was like at school I used to love infant school junior school I used to love writing and reading but erm you know when I was at secondary school as far as everybody was concerned I didn’t do any work that’s because the bloody books were I had read that sort of stuff six years ago you know I could get through they’d hand out text book the the reading books and it was at a reading age so far below me you know so I just there and doodled and got a reputation for making trouble and was dropped down…dropped down over the year until the third year when my English teacher was kind of handing out the school books back and he said to ‘Paul whats all that drawing on your book all those kind of scratchy little things?’ and I said ‘ah it’s from the Lord of the Rings’ you know I had written in Elven Ruins sort of stuff around my book and he said ‘you read the Lord of the Rings?’ and I was like ‘two or three times’ ‘what are you doing in my classes?’ you know and then from that point on in picked up a bit in terms of lessons you I look back and I realise I was sort of being set extra work you know he would kinda lend me a book ‘oh you should go and read this and bring it back next week’ and what not because you know kinda missed out on that erm so you know that was sort of alright erm everything else I couldn’t really be bothered with untoward sort of I guess after about sort of the third of fourth year I started skipping school a lot more didn’t like it erm and you know other things kind of came up drink and weed and rock music [laughs] erm and you know my mum at that sort of time was working it was very easy just to not get out of bed in the morning you know sometimes if I had to I used to occasionally bunk off and go and sit in the library all day [laughs] and read work my way through the shelves and what not which is kind of bunking of school to go to the library

*[Laughs]*

That happened a few times erm I guess I could never really be bothered with it you know erm

*What were you doing when you were bunking off when you weren’t in the library?*

I’d just sit at home you know read books it’s all I ever did really erm yeah listen to music I can’t really remember what I got up to. It’s like a sort of age sort of age between being a kid and playing with things and being a grown up and not playing with things you know thinking that you shouldn’t I don’t remember what I did I didn’t have any hobby’s after puberty really you know all hobbies were babyish I didn’t play sports erm

*Did you have hobbies before you were?*

Yeah all kids did you know and I was a little when I was very little I liked to have toy cars which I run over them with a big truck and then…Transformers that was always very into Transformers and Dinosaurs like all children are you know if you asked me when I was eight what I wanted to do when I grow up I would say ‘ I want to be a palaeontologist’ and all the adults around me would be like ‘I don’t even know what that means well done’ pat pat sort of thing erm you know [laughs] I used to show off by explaining like what things Latin things mean because I had a dinosaur book and they had the names in Latin and translated into English and stuff you know and like my family thought that was brilliant

*Hmmm*

You know so I imagine they all thought I was very clever but never lived up to it academically

*And you think that was just because they they didn’t recognise your cleverness at secondary school and you kind of got got put into that box?*

They they didn’t have time to recognise anyone’s cleverness there was no gifted and talented scheme for identifying kids at some might have benefited from erm you know there was just a few most kids who were disruptive caused trouble and they needed to be looked after but a kid like me who you know just wanted to read book and like draw pictures of monsters you know there’s not really anything it was just I wasn’t making trouble you know?

*Hmmm*

Erm you couldn’t get away with it at school these days er just not doing any work and showing up as and when you feel like

*And do you did your mum know you were staying at home a lot of the time?*

Hmmm not really no erm my grandma used to come in every lunch time to feed the dogs erm you know you can’t really leave the dogs come in feed them let them out again and stuff my family very in to dogs lots and lots of dogs erm and you know I would be at home and so that was she’s coming in at lunch time and I’d hide so she didn’t know I was there erm and I got caught out once because I was still in bed and the dogs had come up and lay on the bed and stuff and er shut the door behind them gone to sleep and so when erm my grandma got there the dogs bounded up to see her and were scrabbling at the door and what not and I opened it and she’s like ‘oh you r in are you could of phoned me’ and what not and while your home and obviously got back to my mum but what could she do really, don’t bunk of school and I was like ‘alright I won’t bunk off school anymore’ you know erm at one point my erm er er I was bunking of school and a phone call came through from erm my head of year at the time you know I just waited for it to be recorded on the answer phone and I deleted it straight away yeah you could get away with it a lot more I guess in the in the early nineties I suppose but they don’t you know doesn’t teach you a while back you couldn’t couldn’t get away with it that way and my little brother was at the same sort of age erm he was eventually asked to leave at sixth form college because he was doing the same thing but you know six years later they couldn’t have somebody there who wasn’t going to pass the exams because it affects their lead tables so he went off and didn’t really do anything else for a few years erm yeah so I didn’t really like school very much erm I didn’t really didn’t like most of the people I was at school with erm

*So who were your…did who were your friends were you were you did you have friends? Did you have many friends at secondary school?*

Erm the first couple of years I was there I had like one or two friends and I was always like the fall-guy of the group and so I wasn’t happy you know like it’s not fun having people who only keep you around because they want somebody to like take the piss out of or to sort of bellower down than them erm I started making friends a bit more kind of time around we started doing out GCSE’s because I realised I kind of learnt to be a bit of a joker you know and realise you can get away with things a bit more if your sort of being quiet and not answering you know and trying to keep your head in the book if your sort of take the piss back and what not and you know I made friends who I still kind of occasionally don’t see now and again but he’s somewhere else but apart from that you know from whole school years I’ve got there’s three people I was at school with that I am still friends with now on Facebook and that’s [laughs] you know that’s it because I just didn’t like any of them really. I tried to fit in especially later on you know and I was sort of being a bit of a joker you know and stuff but I never really very good at it erm we didn’t share values and what not erm so I sort of flitted mostly from social group to social group you know and I never really felt like I fit in so erm I mean that’s probably I years later being diagnosed with personality disorder which kind of sort of fits you know exactly that sort of thing erm but I never really never really managed to make any good friends at school so I didn’t really enjoy that very much at all

*Hmmm and I guess the reason I was asking about friends because I am interested in how started getting involved in politics and*

Hmmm I think the thing for me erm I was brought up erm Christian and while that didn’t last I kind of I got this whole thing about right and wrong and I got that very heavily that’s the sort of the thing I picked up and you know as I kind of sort of adolescent and I started paying attention to world events and stuff I couldn’t really I couldn’t help but keep perceiving that’s things were wrong you know this is not this is not right that this should happen you know and if you just think well something that is wrong is something that causes people more harm and good it does and something that is right is something that you know creates more happiness than it does harm and you know and that’s sort of simplistic but [church bell ringing] that’s kind of what drew me into it I kind of just had this strong idea about what was right and what was wrong

*Hmmm*

And erm that’s yeah what led me to sort of politics and I didn’t sort of decided one day that I was you know going to be an activist or anything like that I wouldn’t even call myself an activist now to be honest, it doesn’t fit I am just kind of doing stuff but it just seemed to me you know as I learnt about various things that the government was doing a lot of bad things.

*Can you remember sort of specifically what the events were that were initially*

….Hmmm

*Objectionable to you?*

I guess erm the important things that led me into it was animal rights especially erm I mentioned before I kind of grew up in a house full of dogs my mums mother was er a dog breeder er posh kennel club dog breeder rather than a puppy farmer and I grew up surrounded my dogs erm there was always at least two in the house I grew up in my grandma had seven eight erm at pretty much any given time er she’s got four at the moment and she can barely walk [laughs] so that’s sometimes with litters at one point with puppies in the house there was over twenty or thirty twenty five twenty six dogs in my grandma’s house erm but you know there was like eight to twelve at any given time and so I kind of grew up around dogs if I you know its kind of a bit of a running joke between my girlfriend and myself you know about it I see the world through like a XXXX member of a pack than as a human being does you know that very true in a lot of way you know erm and yeah I was always sort of bleeding heart about animals er can’t stand to see them hurt and that sort of I was vegetarian on and off from about the age of eight until I was thirteen when finally stopped eating meat for good and I haven’t gone back since you and I extended that from not just you don’t hurt your pets you don’t hurt any animals and I was very you know very into animal rights and there was a lot of animal rights stuff going on when I was twelve or thirteen live animal exports stuff like that erm there was a lot of things in the news about it and erm and a lot of talk as well about the hunting that was going on, there was a strong campaign to ban in in ninety two ninety three and erm its not that I was I involved in any of them but I was you know I was very interested in it and that sort of led me vaguely into sort of environmentalism and so I was reading about in the newspapers and stuff [chair squeaking] erm and yeah I guess from the environmentalism I became interested in the road stuff erm

*So did you who who were the first environmentalists that you kinda came into contact with?*

Oh gosh, I couldn’t really give you any names

*I I don’t mean name particularly more just like, what was the scene…*

Oh oh I had read about lots of this in the newspaper you know and I read a lot erm so I had almost certainly read books about animal rights by that stage and sort of environmental ethics and things like that I couldn’t really tell you what it was I’d read there was all sorts of amateur philosophy and things like that erm you know it was years before I could read the strong stuff [laughs] but you know and I kind of I read a lot of newspapers I spent a lot of time in the local library reading newspapers and periodicals and things and you know so I knew what was going on in Leytonstone and I remember as a child maybe probably wasn’t that young even because it hadn’t been going that long but I remember going past Claremont Rd on the Tube erm we went everywhere by Tube in our Family because my dad was a train driver so we all got cheap tickets and it was brilliant something called a privilege ticket and I had that right up through being a student and you it was basically like a pound to go anywhere

*Wow*

It was like you literally could go and I got of got a train to York of Glasgow for a pound so that was wonderful little thing and you know you could get like yeah so a pound travel card and go anywhere so it was brilliant. So we went everywhere by tube and erm that because we lived in Gants Hill on the Central Line every time went into London or what not went past Claremont Rd and it was all sort of gradually getting more and more painted up and there was more and more sort of graffiti and murals and things painted on the walls of houses that that faced onto the tracks and you know that’s really fascinating stuff for a kid like the just it seemed so colourful and what not and I kinda of I put two and two together and connected these people to environmental movement it kind of felt like I wanted to go down and join erm but I was very, very very sort of socially awkward and anxious

*How old were you at the time?*

Well the first time I went down there it was probably ninety ninety three I imagine, I had first I went on my first demo in October ninety three erm so probably would have been sort spring ninety ninety three and I would have been coming up fifteen I think…yes

*Yeah*

Erm you know and I was tried to be brave sort of went [laughs] I had on some cut-off cut-off jeans short and a Rage Against the Machine t-shirt and off I went to to Claremont Rd and like I was absolutely shitting myself because I didn’t I didn’t know what to expect I didn’t have any preconceptions about so sort of I kind of imagined it to be like a sort of professional operation and I would go down there and I be introduced to people what and you know and something something amazing would happen. But kinda what happened it I went down there and nobody paid me any sort of attention what so ever and I went into the office house and said hello and some sort of I can’t really remember it very well I asked you know I put my name down on a mailing list erm and was told about the phone tree erm which was a system we had back then if it was going to be evicted they would call maybe twenty numbers and each of those twenty people had twenty numbers to phone themselves and each of would spiral out so that in the pre-internet day and mobile days you could get your message spread very very quickly erm it was a very good system got my got my number put on that erm put my name on their mailing list and on the er reclaim the streets mailing list erm which had just literally just started making reclaim the streets and having having my name on that mailing list then I am certain has caused me all manner of jip at passport control in America since then but I can’t be sure [laughs] so there you go whenever they put my passport through they look angry and then I am off to the random check section there you go erm because you know America the American government designated reclaim the streets as a terrorist organisation in the nineties

*Did they?*

They did they did

*Hmmm*

So I imagine that it the reason why I get trouble at passport control in America erm because we know they police gathering intelligence from the mailing list you know everybody on that mailing list had been named in eviction orders later on and various things. So anyway I said you know what you know what do we want to do and er and they were just like ‘walk along if you see a crane jump on it’ I was like ‘oh right okay’ [laughs] and I was so wet behind the ears I was kind of walking down the the kind of the I suppose it was Grove Green Rd and it was all sort of boarded up everywhere and I was like ‘do I climb over one of these? What if there’s security’ so you know ‘how do I get in?’ I didn’t realise people would even just barrelled over or that there were boards you could push aside and door that says ‘welcome come in here’ you know and where there were gates they had security on them so I was ‘oh okay’

*And your by yourself?*

I was by myself yeah cause I didn’t have any friends that would come down with me nobody…you know no body was interested in that sort of thing erm yeah I don’t think I don’t think I probably even asked anybody it would seem pretty pointless to the few friends I did have erm and you know I at one point saw a crane with a couple of people sitting on it and I just shouted ‘do you need any help?’ and they shouted back ‘no’ and I said ‘oh’ and carried on walking and I got to Leytonstone Station and I was like ‘well there you go’ and went home again and that was kind of that was sort of my my introduction as it were

*So erm so you walked from the office house which was in…*

It was by Leyton Station

*By Leyton Station all the way up to Leytonstone Station*

Yeah yeah basically along Grove Green Rd

*Along Grove Green Rd and you worked by yourself but were there other were there other people?*

There were there was plenty of people hanging around in Claremont Rd erm sitting on various sofas out in the street and people doing things in the trees and there was always the sound of woodwork being doing somewhere erm you know there was some people just whenever they had nothing to do would get on with building something or other you know that would be useful and other people had nothing to do got on with like you know smashing things up and calling it art [laughs] erm yeah but that was like the first time and you know there was people up in there was people up in cranes but I was you know I was kind of too wet and shy to go and make my presence felt erm

*And was…sorry just one more question about that was it and official demo that or was it you just turned up?*

No no I just turned up one day because the protest was ongoing really there was not really any sort of official things it was just people got up in the morning and then they went out and if they saw a crane they could get onto before security came along they’d do it and people would go out in ones and two’s you know erm at night people would go out in ones and twos as well and try and smash things [laughs] erm you know so everybody in the area kind of knew about it by then erm I am getting my times messed up a little bit there was erm a very big or it was very local er demo erm around that sort of time at no wait sorry I am…it’s a long there’s been a long time so I am just trying to make sure I get things right

*No problem yeah, take your time*

Okay so that was ninety three so I had been there then and I went down to Claremont Rd itself in early ninety four a couple of times just sort of mulled around doing like party days or open days or whatever erm but I didn’t really get involved in much more then erm towards the end of ninety four it was evicted and erm I didn’t I didn’t get my phone tree call well I did but my mum took it so she didn’t mention anything she didn’t want me getting in any trouble er so I’d came I come home from school that day the Monday morning and erm I can’t remember why I come home from lunchtime but it was on the news the eviction was going to start so I ran back to school tried to rustle up anybody to come along with me erm because the sixth form a lot of people were getting into politics a bit more and I thought then I could drag people down erm only one person came with me erm we kind of got down there and again didn’t really know what to do sort of thing there was hundreds of people there

*Did you know a few people down there by that stage?*

Not at that stage no erm so there was there just loads of people in the trees there was people in the roofs there was people in hanging basket hanging erm cargo nets and things like that erm and everybody was waiting for the police to arrive there was media everywhere and what not

*What sort time of day was this?*

Well I’d come [sighs] got from school so I got back to school again about oneish and went straight from there to Claremont Rd which would of taken maybe half an hour so it was probably about three o’clock erm and yeah we didn’t really know anybody so we just sort of stood around you know because there’s no sort of real organisation erm so there was like lots and lots of people who were sympathetic most of whom probably didn’t know anybody from who lived on the street really and nobody who lived there was really organising anybody what what they should of done is had kind of stewards or something like that to say right ‘you lot go in there you lot go in that house’ and things like that because basically there’s loads and loads of people just sort of milling around waiting around waiting to be told what to do

*Hmmm*

And that’s very sort of common at these things I now know so in the end we just sort of stood there and then the police moved and they kind of pushed down the road from the west side cleared it out that way and you know some people got into the houses and some people clambered up trees and some people were locked on in the ground so they couldn’t be moved erm but for the most part the police pushed people back and every so often a group people would sit down and hold them up and they used to drag them off again it was a very very exciting erm very exciting so that would have been late ninety four so I am sort of sixteen at this time and er I was kind of you know I’d only done a couple of demos by that stage but I’d already sort of became familiar with the sort of the violent policing of demonstrations and stuff but even then I one of my enduring memories of the time was seeing a group of policeman dragging away like a sort of woman who would have been in her sixties who was er there was a medic I suppose protest medic and you know she was crying out in pain and they weren’t listening and I was I was kind of shocked even then I mean I still had some sort of idea that there was fair play going on erm even though I’d sort of you know very narrowly avoided being ran over by a police horse you know during a police charge at a criminal justice bill demo a couple of months back you know and I had seen a fair amount of police heavy policing at that stage but I was still kind of shocked by that you know and erm so everybody’s clearing out and the people on the roofs are shouting and some stuff is being thrown and you know were kind of gradually being moved back and you know I guess the best thing you can do then is just to sort of at least if your going to have to be moved move slowly you know I think these days I do you know gone up into the houses are whatever but you know we’d moved out then and you know after that my school acquaintance went off home and I sort hung around for a bit erm and yeah it was I don’t really remember how it happened but we were closed off and a load of protesters who were sort of living around there went back off to a squatted dairy which is just around the other side of the railway tracks and to sort of refuel erm and to work out some tactics and stuff and erm so I went with them because it seemed like the thing to do erm back there was a couple of people who been badly beaten up erm by the police and a couple of people who were too drunk to do anything erm and this was this was where people were living at the time and so yeah everybody was quite…a lot of very emotional people there as well because people who had not managed to get in to the houses they’d lived in for ages and some locals who used to live in the houses erm you know I met er met some I can’t remember names erm no I am sorry erm you know I met all sorts of people I’d come to sort of get to know a bit better over the forthcoming sort of year and a half erm and so I was yeah I went back there you know there an ongoing there was a guy a couple of guys still in the houses people still underground there was it was a very long eviction erm there were various tunnels from the back gardens of residents houses that went and down under and into the houses on Claremont Rd and so there was still people getting into the properties for a while

*So between the houses on Grove Green Rd and the houses on…*

Yeah so you go through the house in Grove Green Rd and there’d be a tunnel in the back garden that would lead up and into the cellars of the houses in erm on Claremont Rd so it took a little while for those to be stopped off because what the police were doing they were clearing a house from from the west and they’d clear the house and when they were happy it was cleared they’d demolish it and they’d do the next one so it was quite scary as well because you know there’s a huge huge tower there and er you I can you got the feeling that the whole row at any time erm you know I don’t think it could of done really but it felt like that you know and you knew there were people in tunnels underneath those houses and there were often arrested straight away and would disappear for twenty four hours so there was this sense of fear like people could could being buried alive in there you now and all the time there was an on-going demo at the corner of erm Grove Green Rd and I can’t think which road it was er near Leybourne but there was like an on-going demo there and whenever the police took somebody out there they didn’t want to arrest they just dragged them through and threw them out there erm and yeah so we was there sort of every every day all day for the next few days erm

*Did were you ever in the tunnels?*

No I was never in the tunnels I didn’t spend much time in the houses at all erm you know this sort of stuff was at the beginning of my M11 career as it were erm yeah you know I still sort of it was very exciting and erm I was there all day every day erm and er at some point apparently I was spotted erm by a teacher who lived nearby and you know there since I was at sixth form there things were by this time so things were a little more lenient and there was quite a few sort of the old fashioned lefties teachers there so I was erm you know got sort of ‘Ah Mr White been sick have you?’ and I went ‘Yes’ and they said ‘Well done’ sort of things and that was quite pleasing I mean I was not really going to school much [rattling of keys] at that stage erm supposed to be doing A-Levels but

*What what subjects were you studying?*

Literature politics and History I was disappointed with politics A-Level I was kind of expecting it to be ethics because for me politics and ethics were the same thing and in fact they still aren’t to be honest but it was sort of procedural politics it was how government works and things like that stuff that would be quite useful to know if you were planning to be an activist but that wasn’t how I saw myself then and I was very very idealistic so I didn’t think that’s how change would work anyway or that the change that did happen through that sort of methods wouldn’t be worth having you know like comprise politics still not very good at it to be honest erm yeah so that was that was December I think it was December the fourthhhh or something like that erm and that went on for the whole week and you know there’s a lot of time spent shouting and a lot of time back at the dairy at the dairy and I was absolutely captivated by the people who lived at the dairy erm

*I was just going to yeah I was just going to ask more about that about the people and also the space and exactly where was it?*

Erm I could pin it on a map probably it’s probably a housing development now but at the time it was a Unigate dairy property that had was basically a yard with a couple of small buildings attached that had been empty for a while now there was erm it was just a place people were living really

*And it was on it was on Grove…*

No

*No*

It was around the back of er on the side of Leyton Station

*Okay*

So it was on the south side of the tracks erm next to the grave yard

*Okay*

Which was opposite there

*Yeah okay*

It was quite convenient because every now and again there would be like another attempt by people to get in over the through the graveyard and over the tracks but mostly that just ended up with people being arrested and there was lots of police just wondering around in the graveyard all night to try and stop that from happening [squeaking of chair] excuse me

*And erm yeah and tell me tell me about being captivated by the people?*

They just lived very different lives to the ones I had ever experienced I guess you know I erm even assuming that everybody is sort of when they are telling stories about things there sort of aggrandising themselves still very interesting people you know I’d talk to people who been travelling in South America and I talked to people who’d been you know talked to one guy who literally got out of prison come to come to Claremont Rd because he had friends who were living there and got dragged into the protest and he’d been in prison for years for dealing LSD he seemed like a very intelligent man at the time erm you know and there was another bloke who’d been in and out of prison and he was quite a er his name Scoth something Schofield and he died a few years ago according to people in the erm Claremont Rd group on Facebook and the two of them were telling stories about their different experiences as a prisoner and just like I mean even if it was all nonsense it was just it was like exciting and scary all at once you know erm

*Can you remember any of the stories?*

Just just just stories about just mostly about violence violence and boredom you know erm being given beatings by prison guards and you know people that you’d made friends with disappearing one day and you never finding out if they were transferred or if they died or if they’d suddenly been given a surprise congratulations your out sort of thing you know and just like…the claustrophobia of having to get on with people you know and stories about I guess one of the really sort of reminded me later I got reminded of it later on living at university but everybody kind of playing their music as loud as they could to drown out everybody else’s music and you know how often that would lead to violence and things like that just mad me sound horrible you know the bloke who’d er been in for doing for selling LSD had said you just spend all you time doing bodybuilding because that’s all there is to do and he was really built and as you know I went in I was like a you know [laughs] like a stringy old middle class boy you know [laughs] erm in that was there when I first sort of became acquainted with the brew crew types as well you know er sort of whether not there just alcoholics who’d haven to fallen in the the protesters or people whose values were genuinely aligned with but are unwilling or unable to stay off the special brew all day they were a funny bunch[laughs]

*What was your attitude to them at the time?*

Scared and intimidated mostly erm I was always very intimated by men particularly erm I…I felt like every all the adult men I knew were macho and they spoke with such violence all the time and I was beaten up a lot when I was young just in the street by people who didn’t like the look of me

*Just strangers?*

Yeah at least three of four occasions you know and that just just what happened it was a violent it felt really like there just violence everywhere you know erm yeah I’d been chased out of pubs I’d have glasses thrown at me I’d been beaten up in the street on my own three or four times all of this just as a teenager and I…

*Why do you know I mean…*

I never really…I looked different or presumably you know I had long hair and bad fashion sense looked like a hippy just happened all the time you know and I lived in fear in the end by the time I was eighteen I was getting panic attacks if somebody was going to come pick me up and we were going out somewhere I didn’t know they were panic attacks I don’t know anything about it getting these sort of mental health I lived in absolute fear. So these intimidating brew crews types you know I was scared of them and I came to some of them I came to get on with as I sort of got to know them but I ‘d lived quite a sort of I dunno like my life was always I felt like somehow I was always very different and separated and grew up in a bubble or something because I wasn’t able to sort of replicate that violence in my thought and behaviour you know I was at that sort of time I was sort of a pacifist completely erm you know but I didn’t really have much choice to be honest I so yeah I was scared of men and shouting burly rough men particularly because they were the ones always fucking you know I I look back now and it was actually the people who I’d been beaten up by were always just like them teenagers who were a bit older than me you know desperate to sort of prove their manhood t each other by beating up someone who looks different like I’d never had any real shit from proper grownups particularly…a couple of times but you know type are all taught you see in all the pubs and stuff they’re were like what are you fucking looking at?’ you know its shitty football violence threats and things like that

*And it didn’t I mean the effect on you wasn’t to become violent yourself it was*

No I always turned it inwards

*…it sounds like it was the opposite*

I was very depressed in my teens you see erm and erm very anxious so it was I look back now and I think I done very well in going out doing things on my own because by that sort of time you know I was shaving panic attacks before going out, going out clubbing to the island which used to be down there where there’s a restaurant now and you know like I got ounce din the chip shop outside once after the club because somebody took offence at the fact I had like a German army jacket on and that sort of thing erm I was getting panic attacks all the time and I just lived in fear and I didn’t I thought that’s how life is you know I thought every XXXX was like this so you could see why I left when I was eighteen you know and didn’t come back again [laughs] erm

*So sorry where did you leave when you were eighteen?*

I moved out of my mums house the summer I turned eighteen which was ninety six and I lived in a shitty squat for a few months with some fucking guy who was basically a psychopath but I didn’t know any better because I didn’t really have any life experience

*Where was that?*

Leyton up by the Bakers Arms erm

*Okay*

And then I moved home for a little bit went to college for a few months to top up my A-Levels which I failed because I got really low grades because I didn’t really work cause…

*Because you were at Claremont Road?*

Well [laughs] because there wasn’t any work really but you know there was I was doing a fair amount of activism I guess erm but yeah we kind of getting years ahead so

*Yes so let’s go back to the dairy*

Yeah so the

*And you were talking about talking about the people at the dairy*

Yeah so you know there was a lot of really interesting characters there was a was a women there she seemed really old to to me but er I can’t remember what her name was I keep coming back to Lillian but like Lillian was the very old lady who was removed by the ambulances from Claremont Rd at the last minute but she was a you know there was a women who’d lived on the streets street all of her life and erm she was very very interesting stories erm I wish I could remember her name

*Not Dolly?*

No no I mean not Dolly no I remember Dolly I only met her once erm I think it was Lillian you know I think it was Lillian

*Hmmm*

And er she was she was a good once for stories very interesting and it was a real strange sort of coming together of different people erm and what I found I like was that like they weren’t like the grownups I knew you know like when I expressed my opinions about stuff they didn’t sort of argue with me or roll their eyes or anything like that and you know and they sort of had values and they lived by values and it’s not like my parents didn’t particularly I was estranged by my dad at that point and seen him since he him from months to months at that sort of time as we got older it got worse erm but they they actually they were willing to do something you know my mum had all these nice values but she wouldn’t do anything and that seemed to me an amazing compromise you know and I still kind of do a bit I think if you believe in something it’s better to do something than anything you know like you can’t save the entire world you can’t take on every cause or anything but just do what’s in front of you know the first one that comes to hand or the one that affects you and the people around you you know my mum had been brought up to believe in the rule of law and you know to be scared of policeman because policeman are watching you all the time you know she’s still a bit scared of policeman [laughs] erm and yeah so you know the values my parents lived by was slightly different erm but you know were kind of all…all sort seemed to be equal in that environment which was something weird for me because at that time I kind of didn’t feel like I was equal of anybody really erm and that was nice and you know and I learnt lots of stuff by listening people arguing about the right way do protests is you know

*Hmmm*

I was introduced to the concept of fluffy and spikey and things like that

*Erm for the sake of the tape will you tell me about the difference between…?*

Fluffy is no-confrontational erm it’s kind of pacifist erm the worst fluffy people would do is damage equipment and what not where as spikey is very confrontational erm sometimes deliberately so like you’d just go out there and you don’t take any shit erm and they both have their appropriate uses I think

*And where did you where did which felt which was your kind of natural home?*

I think at the time my natural home was fluffy erm having you know I lived in fear of violence at the time and erm you know I am not I am very gently person by nature I am not a violent person at all erm sometimes I am very angry but any you know I can certainly morally justify violence in a good cause but I am not a violent person myself and one I am no longer politically pacifist or politically particularly fluffy I also think that it would be wrong of me to advocate a violent protest if I am not willing to that violence myself and I still think that way I am you know I can understand the spikey argument but not really willing to do it myself so erm whether that’s essentially a defeatist position or not I leave to the listeners to judge [laughs]

*[Laughs]*

That’s just how it is I am not and you know there was I am sure there some people there at the time who you know some of the brew crews especially are like…like to whip people up into a frenzy and then slide off of quietly whilst you know everybody else is having a fight with the police and what not and I don’t think that’s very fair [laughs] but you know I am certainly erm I don’t know I believe in appropriate levels at demos erm that is sort of a sliding scale depending on what the cause is and what the outcome of any sort of force used might be and you know so on and so forth but erm I think the best way of getting round it is to look at what they used to call pixy patrols that’s where you go out at night and like destroy a digger or a crane or what not you know that’s like the nice combo because it’s very hard, I don’t think policeman are generally very nice people but smashing their faces in doesn’t really doesn’t really further anything particularly unless you know it’s a smash policeman’s face in demo which [laughs] I am sure there’s been a few of those erm so yeah it’s not really for me but there’s a real kind of eye opener the stuff at the dairy erm

*And erm erm what were you what were you doing in were you in the dairy sort of day in day out? What was actually what was kind of the activity?*

Well basically the activity was sitting around fires trying to or erm mostly drinking and telling stories with occasional bouts erm people going off to do different actions like erm to get food either stolen or skipped or bought depending on you know the person involved erm because trying to get food to the people who were still in the houses or in the towers was very difficult so you had at least one tunnel from Grove Green Rd and that was alright until that was closed up and you had erm people sort of running packages and chucking them through windows and things like that so can people can eat erm just trying to get people some food you know [drinks water] and at night the people in the towers what they were doing is the police were waiting until they went to sleep and then they were getting a cherry picker up there and nabbing them so there was always people on the ground behind the barrios shouting to wake them up whenever the police came because they you know fi they couldn’t if the person woke and moved away the police would take their bedding and stuff so they you know in the idea that they’d get really cold and decided to come down and the last guy was up there for four days erm four days he was the last one and twenty four hours without food or water at the tower I don’t think I’d be very happy about that [laughs] that would be pushing me to my limits

*That was the last person that was at the tower?*

Yeah so I think that was Thursday Thursday night they got him

*Do you know what his name was?*

Can’t remember but there will be I am sure people in the Facebook group who can tell you that

*Was it it wasn’t Phil XXXX was it?*

I couldn’t say for sure

*Don’t know don’t know fine*

At the time I was a, you know just a sort of shy and callow youth who was at the back of standing at the back and mostly listening to other people talk really erm you know I’ve often done that most of my life I guess [laughs] listening to people talk and erm its just I dunno that how I’ve always been I supposed that’s I guess problems of being shy and anxious erm so yeah that was er December ninety four

*Can I just ask were they…did I mean your talking about being a shy an anxious young person?*

Hmmm

*And I am just wondering what the kind of reception was like with I mean your talking about these people living in this different way*

Yeah

*And did you feel that they were…were they very open and welcoming to you or?*

…It seemed to very well

*How did that kind of play out?*

Because mostly it was sort of an apathy really like not a cool apathy or anything like that if people were there they were there you know and they were like people would welcome their friends but you could just go and sit around a the fire just be like ‘alright’ and whoever was holding forth might pause for a minute but you know there was you know there’s always lots of egos involved in any sort of protest so you know lots of storytellers and lots of people who are desperate to tell everybody there version of reality erm which these day I find bloody annoying [chair squeaking] I tend to go somewhere else on the whole but back then again it was you know very fascinating because they were talking about stuff that no no people didn’t talk about in my world

*Hmmm*

And they all had such passion you know like I think some nights I’d probably of like agreed with people holding completely different arguments because they expressed them so well or what felt like well at the time so forcefully I’d be like ‘yeah no I see that I see that’ and somebody else would argue and be like ‘no but’ you know [laughs] that was a good learning curve I think but er yeah it kind of went quite after that so

*Erm sorry I’ve got a few more questions*

It’s alright [laughs]

*On this on this [laughs] erm just in terms of the things people were you know like the live debates of the time*

Hmmm

*The things people were really concerned about*

Yes

*Can you have you got any mem…I said I know that it’s a long time ago*

Not really I am afraid sorry it’s er a long time ago and that sort of time for the most part the protest was taking up everybody’s experience

*So were people maybe was people arguing about the way that the sort of…*

Yeah

*The way to defend Claremont Rd or the way too*

Yeah arguing about things like whether or not to try and like rush lines of police to get through they were people trying to get food both for themselves for people living in that because there was a number of other squats around like the dairy was the only one I knew and went to erm and you know ways for getting food because don’t have a lot of money and you know some some of the local residents would help out buy food bring food down and things like that but of you know there’s often times were people doing kind of various stages of the actually doing like begging patrols so you know who turn is it to go out and beg and things like that and there was always going missions to get food out the back of skips, which was fairly constant you know go down Leytonstone High Rd and go round back and get get skipped food and things like so you know keeping people in food and water took up a lot of organisation and it was a bit tricky because some people after being taken off the roof had kind of they’d either been arrested or they’d gone somewhere to lie down for a bit you know or they gone back to which ever country…er part of the country they’d been from and all the sort of normal organisation patterns seemed to be a bit broken so basically yeah it was sort of how to get food and water and you know how to keep the people in still in the houses and in the tower restocked with food and water and you know how we how’d we get in things like that occupied

*Hmmm*

Most of the peoples sort of time erm when they weren’t hanging out and telling stories and you know its things like I can remember one guy had his glasses smashed by the police and you know he was very very short-sighted and trying to work out ways of finding enough money to get together so he could get some new ones you know. Just little simple practical things you know and keeping warm because it December and you know the police would always take peoples blankets things like that they’re very popular idea take the blankets and you know and a lot of people who’d been in the properties just wanted to go somewhere with like central heating and have a bath and kick back for a couple of days because they’d they’d you know they’d been through a really tough time like you know I I’d if I’d lived my life for XXXX with the knowledge I would of gone in one of those houses and I’d would of stayed on the roof for on the tower until I was removed but I can’t tell you I would of enjoyed it [laughs] because it was hard you know like I said with derelict houses are a hard place to live and you know

*So what is it that makes you say that you’d do that if you had your life to live again?*

I guess [sighs] because I didn’t really do much you know I was there and most I really achieved was sort of slowing a policeman down for about two and a half seconds as they pushed me out the way you know like I gave some food and water to people erm some moral support and just bulked out the you know the supporting cast as it were but like I’d liked to have felt like I was a bit more involved erm and you know I was pleased with myself because I did later on get more you know it becomes more my story rather than just something I am doing

*Hmmm*

But erm you know at the time I wish I’d kind of…been brave enough to sort of go and say ‘right hello where shall I sit? what’s the best’ you know ‘what’s the best use of my body’ sort of thing [laughs] you know to help slow the police down locked on or just something you know…[screws bottle] so that was yeah erm that’s kind of my bit with Claremont Rd itself

*I’ve just got more questions about Claremont Rd*

Yeah

*Well about the dairy and about that particular area I just want to ask about meetings, where you ever in like more kind of official meetings or did that not happen so much?*

Erm

*Was it more just like…?*

Erm not when I was there when I was there it was very ad hoc

*Okay*

Erm you know I was I was at the reclaim the streets meeting and er in Claremont Rd one time but I didn’t really you know I wasn’t really paying a lot of attention I was just happy to be there

*Hmmm*

It was one of the like two or three times I came down and there was sort of actions going on and I didn’t get involved with anything because I didn’t really know what was going everybody else seemed to who what was going on and I didn’t so…I guess a very good statement of ninety ninety three and four for me really

*[Laughs]*

Erm yeah so that was kind of the beginning of my involvement in you know those just as a youngster sort of hanging around erm XXXX and protesters erm I didn’t really get involved in anything until they took the Willow Brook road house which was a couple of months later and erm that was there was by Leytonstone Leytonstone Station and it was a listed building it was part of the terrace and they knocked down all the rest of the terrace and there was this one big house still standing and they had to get permission to bulldoze it and so one night some of the erm you know M11 protest crew were walking past the house and they noticed that instead of security guards there was a note on the door saying ‘garden number nine’ has gone for a cup of tea or something gone to make a phone call so er one of them hopped in quickly put a section section six I think it was on the door and one ran off to get as many people as they could so that was that was how Willow Brook was taken and erm

*And erm again just for the sake of the tape*

Yeah

*Can you tell me what section six is?*

A section six is a

*…Vaguely*

Is a legal notice that basically says that under six six of which ever erm act er once people living in the house you can’t evict them without a court order erm and they put that up there just to…I didn’t really protect you properly but it did it does help with like the government buildings were they wouldn’t just send in some heavies to remove you erm at least not without court orders and so on and you can do appeals and it can it runs and runs. So the section six notice was basically sort of legal notification that we live here and like you know you can’t just come in and throw us out anymore so the security guards would come back and be like ‘ahhh I am just about to be sacked’ which is probably what happened erm yeah so it was a huge huge house you know there one two three four four three stories a basement and an attic…very big over the next sort of month or so loads and load of people moved in and so this was a time when I am not going to school very much and I’ve no idea how I even knew about it at all erm I might I probably bumped into somebody I recognised from the protest and they said ‘oh come down here’ so that’s probably what happened but I really I couldn’t tell you how I went from knowing erm how I first showed up at the house or whatever I can’t remember at all but you know it’s Spring ninety ninety five and I start going down the house fairly regularly erm and there’s like a core group of maybe half a dozen people who are living there so I get to know them quite well erm a bloke called John there’s always a bloke called John

*[Laughs]*

Erm cheesy Keith I can’t remember why he was cheesy erm John John the cook was another John I think

*I’ve interviewed him*

Ah okay [laughs] that’s good I hope he’s alright

*Yeah [laughs]*

Erm and who else was there, there was a chap called Nelly I never knew his real name erm there was a Scandinavian women who’s named I can’t remember ermmm [exhales] Richey of course erm who was a guy about my age erm he was a local kid and he lived in an estate erm in Leytonstone and he was kind of very similar to me he was quite semi feral but he was er where where I was sort of shy and introverted he was sort of bold and outgoing and you know I I got on very well with erm in the end he nicknamed me ‘mum’ because I was always expressing concern over his plans [laughs]

*[Laughs]*

Erm and there was always work work to do there like reinforcing the house painting the walls did a lot of a lot of you know I looked at some of the photos of the house and I think ‘oh I painted that’ you know erm I emptied my dad’s shed what the shed form the house and there was dozens and dozens of half full cans of paint there because he used to do a bit of painting and decorating on the side and so over the course of two or three days these were dragged down to to know dragged onto the tube and taken down to Willow Brook Road and painted everything in odd colours it looked very nice and so we got I said it was a big house and there’s you know a tower built at the top and all these huge lengths of wood hammered to the joist of the house erm and then reinforced with dozens it’s all very you know it’s kind of a bit scary thinking about it but there were people who knew what they were doing you know they’ve done this before and it went so far in the air you could climb climb all the way up and you get out of erm it was like on the attic windows and you walked along the and I don’t know what this architectural thing was called but it’s like a stone ridge around the top of the house and then the roof comes up and you walked along there and then you climbed up a ladder which had been built by hammering just bits of wood onto the bare exposed roof joists and your up to the roof

*[Laughs]*

Erm then you’d climb up the ladder and that was another thirty foot forty foot

*Oh my god*

Yeah some people just couldn’t get up there but I was I am alright with heights, went up there and you just sit there and you could see just you know because London’s in a bowl so you don’t really get much of a skyline at best of times you can see for miles on a clear day

*Hmm*

It’s beautiful and like it was so far up that like you couldn’t really road traffic noises unless something was actually driving past the house you know you just sit there for hours and you know just think and chat and you know tie tie some streamers up top there really really long streamers and when they were going in the breeze it was beautiful I was really I sort of felt I felt okay I said there at nights sometimes and I felt a lot more like I fitted in because when I kinda climbed through the hole in the fence and whatnot I said ‘hello’ people knew who I was you know [unscrews bottle]

*Do you need more water?*

I would love more water

*Shall I just fill your bottle up?*

Hmmm please thank you

[Door opening and shuffling]

*Its hard work talking isn’t it*

It is yeah

*And now I am just remembering when I am in when it’s the other way around you do get very thirsty, sorry I am sitting here not doing very much talking at all [laughs]*

That’s alright erm yeah so you know I was there quite a lot over the spring and erm spring months and there was always sort of a core group of about six people there. Sometimes somebody would go away for a couple of weeks and what not I kind of try and get down there two or three times a week stayover now and again erm you know I was still very quiet and wasn’t sort of like the public face of it or anything like that but you know I was I felt a bit more part of it because it was only a small group most you know about a lot of people had left after Claremont Rd and gone to other places Newbury was just kicking off there was erm Blackburn it was M65 protest then there was Fairmile which I think was Devon maybe I am getting two of them confused and it was Glasgow Pollok as well that I think off the top of my head people spread out around there and for the people who didn’t want to live in a derelict house with no running water erm there was also the mental centre which was erm a squatted building in Wanstead erm and they’d painted don the front ‘Wanstead Environmental Centre’ that’s were mental centre comes from and that was sort of the office of the the second wave second part of the protest so after Claremont Rd went the people still taking part in the protest was there at was based from erm the mental centre and erm so you know go down there and hang out with people and what not and then you’d go off and do some action at Willow Brook Rd erm but there wasn’t really much going on to be honest, it was that was kind of that was the quite period I suppose like I felt a bit more like I belonged and spent most of the time sitting sitting up a tower with one or two other people sort of talking rubbish and enjoying you know enjoy being there erm and that was alright erm that was evicted in June ninety five and it was the end of June I think because erm V-Days the beginning of June if I recall and I remember writing a really terrible poem about something called V-Day sitting on top of the sitting on top of the tower erm I couldn’t tell you anything more about the poem but it was about it was about like hypocrisy of celebrating V-Day when you know people dying everywhere teenage bollocks like that

*[Laughs]*

But you know so I know it was June and erm I hadn’t been there since probably since V-Day I had a bit of a you know a little bit of a break for a couple of weeks and erm I went round I way back from a careers not careers fare a university like a UCAS open day with some people from school and I was like and we got into the station and I was like ‘oh I am going to go visit people for now, see you later’ bags full of university perspectives no idea why I did that I never intended to go to university anyway I mean it was just a good excuse to not be at school you know and I went there and one of the guys said to ‘oh have you come for eviction?’ I said ‘we’re being evicted?’ and they got a call early that day from somebody at the police to say we are going to evict you tomorrow and the police…

*That’s very nice of the police too*

Well the thing is there all on overtime aren’t they so the longer it takes the more money they earn

*Oh so it it was an official inside kind of…*

Yes yeah and that happened for that happened at Claremont Rd it happened all the time you know because all the police are on over time and you know the longer it takes to get them out the better it is for them so some somebody will always drop you a line erm which I suppose nice and you know so I was like ‘oh well I’ll have to be back here in the morning then’ so I stayed around help do some barricading and went home and came back at the crack of dawn, getting me out of bed first thing morning was a rarity [laughs] back in those days erm got there a hive of activity erm last minute work being done it was nice there was load of people there loads and loads of people and it was standing lonely on the roof looking back now it’s a little bit scary erm and throughout the house there were you know in every room people barricade every door was barricaded er I think my favourite thing was that erm when when they erm when the house had been occupied by the by guards and the government they’d smashed out all the toilets they stripped the place out so it was kind of unliveable they hadn’t turned the water off and there was a tap in the basement that was the only one that worked people could get water out of that they they’d er turn it on fill like a moat that had been dug around the outside and left it on so the house when is evicted and bulldozed and stuff the water was still going and about a week later a large chunk of Willow Brook Rd fell into a hole [laughs] so that was nice [laughs] erm yeah so that was a really busy day it was a nice day for it

*Where you up on the roof?*

I was up on the roof erm lots of people were were locked on into erm ah barrels up there and they filled the barrels full of concrete except for it’s kind of hard to describe really. So half way down each the barrel and like each of the sort of four points as it were a hole had been dug and a tube a bit of er erm drainpipe I suppose had been put into there before the concrete was poured in the bottom of the drainpipe through the plastic was a bit of metal and you would take your you’d have a carabiner strapped around your wrist and you put your hand down the hole and click the carabiner to the thing and nobody could get you out you would have to unclip the carabiner yourself erm and so that in order the unclip the carabiner they have to then drill out all the concrete all the way down and then unclip you from the inside and it’s a very long very long arduous process which is why lock-ons have been very much beloved people er so there’s people in one of them and I personally wouldn’t of been entirely comfortable being locked into a barrel full of concrete on a you know roof joist that had been open to the weather for you know two years or something but you know it had to be done I’ve people chained to the tower erm and just loads of us were hanging out on the roof very cheesy somebody had got a like an old dunno portable stereo out there and when the police and the bailiffs showed up on mass started playing ‘fuck em and their law’ by the Prodigy which was like the cheesiest thing I could think of but it felt right you know like we didn’t it’s hard to spot cheese sometimes until you’ve had a bit of perspective [takes a drink] er so yeah they had one team going through the building room by room and each room had to come to break through the various layers of erm barricade and things and what you’d do is get a bit of wood and hammer it into the door frame and then you’d get another one up there layers and layers of this and with like corrugated iron in-between and planks and things like that anything that would slow them down so going room from room and they’d smash the place up as thy went to make it really hard for you to retake and what not erm and then they did weird things like they they would smashing the windows with hammers and things, why? Your about to knock the house down what is the point it’s just I felt at times they stoke up the bailiffs and the police they stoke stoke themselves up by doing macho things like you like when they get to the roof they’re throwing the roof tiles off the roof, why are you doing that it makes no sense but you it helps stoke them up for doing work like that I guess I suppose it must be difficult to out dragging people off by the neck and things like that I guess you have to sort your blood up to bit to a point where there sort hitting things with hammers at random [laughs]

*[Laughs]*

And they had cherry pickers picking is off the roof erm that didn’t last very long but you know got down got taken got the photo taken by the police and erm you know pushed out sent on my way I don’t think anybody was arrested that day erm

*Got your photo taken by the police?*

Yeah they do that at demos they’ve been doing it for a long time, it’s so they can get you get a photograph for files you know erm I don’t know

*What there’s just somebody there just generally taking pictures?*

…Yeah it’s not

*It’s not like your taking a side*

No no both they’ve got I can’t remember what they’re called there’s a special team within the police at the time I don’t if there still there probably and they just take pictures at demos all day that’s all they do take pictures and video footage and stuff like that er just constantly and when what the police took us off that and they push you to one side somebody takes a photograph of you full on and they take your XXXX again

*Yeah*

So I don’t know what they do with that stuff but I know they have spotter cards and you know it’s part of evidence collecting and things like that but they try and get photographs of as many people as they can at the time of demos erm you know I guess it just yeah useful intelligence [drinks water] erm yeah and so we had a little bit of a party outside while everybody came down it took hours it was like god knows twelve thirteen hours took them until the last person got off and that was alright and then er I went home and everybody else went to have a big party somewhere else so that was Willow Brook Rd erm and that was pretty good. Er were they moved after that so the environmental centre was still open erm there weren’t there was there was a couple of buildings somewhere else that we were hoping erm would be become there was the same thing waiting to be knocked down hoping to reclaim I don’t believe they ever did there was erm sort er a Claremont Rd down to Willow Brook Rd to Green Man Roundabout it was one wing of the protest but there was another section kind of round on the other side Grove er George Green in Wanstead where houses were being knocked down I was never really involved in it’s the same people but er

*Cambridge Park Rd*

Cambridge Park yes and so I think there was still some stuff going on at Cambridge Park Rd but mostly the people from erm from Willow Brook Rd at er either living at er green mania erm living at the environmental centre or setting up at green mania and green mania was a patch of land at the Green Man Roundabout was then you’ve got a railway track runs along there and on the other side of the railway trick is Wanstead er ponds and you’ve got all the open land and what not ponds and that and then on the other side you’ve got erm yeah the Green Man Roundabout and a patch of land that was triangle shaped erm and that was on Hollybush Hill was the road that sort of went from the Green Man Roundabout and that went down to the environmental centre at the bottom of Wanstead High Rd at Snaresbrook and so we set up there for the summer and we built tree houses there was half a dozen tree houses so them were very well built erm at least one of them was inaccessible to anybody except the one person who built it we had a number of er skyropes for getting between trees we had erm cargo nets set up erm we a couple of tents a couple of homebuilt benders we started building tunnels but didn’t get very far and was like about six foot of tunnel that ended up being filled with rubbish so

*Awww that’s a shame*

Erm yeah there was there was a bender there that had been rebuilt after being firebombed by some Nazi’s one night like quite early in the process

*Again for the sake tape will you tell me a bender is? [laughs]*

So a bender is erm it’s basically a sort of a tent or dome of some sort it’s called a bender because you plant you stick in the ground one way and then you bend them over towards the middle and you sort of tie them together in the middle erm then you cover it with either sort of natural stuff like erm leaves braches with green leaves on and things like that or with tarpon erm polyprop and stuff like that so there’s one of them there and there was a big old erm forced hen which is like a bit like the the tents you think of if you were drawing like a XXXX you’d draw like a big sort of long attempts with fifteen scalps lying toe to toe in there

*Yeah*

So we had one of them that was always open erm that was nice that was another few months we were there for

*And what’s the story with the fire-bombing?*

Er I wasn’t there at the time but some people fire bombed it one night erm and I think somebody was prosecuted for it some somebody from the NF local XXXX I am afraid I’d have to do some internet searching to get the actual answer but you know that’s the sort of thing that happened

*And that was green mania?*

That was at yeah it was green mania, I don’t think it was called green mania then but I think that sort of happened as part as part of the you know erm it was like Leytonstonia and then Munstonia was the Willow Brook Rd house and it’s called Munstonia because it looked like the house from the Munsters erm then Green Lane Roundabout became green mania because it sort of fits I guess erm and it was a fucking tip when we kind of took it over erm because it you know it had erm people staying there but they it was more like they were just living rough and not participating in the protest [gasps] and then during the time during the sort of six months or so that we had the people living there on and off erm we cleared it up there was so many bags of rubbish from the hospital like yellow industrial human waste bags and god knows how these stuff you know did the it was all from Whipps Cross Hospital with like human human waste and bloody stuff in there and like they just that was just dumped around and you think did the hospital people just do that did somebody steal all this stuff and then got this far and went ‘oh my god this like bits of chopped off fingers and stuff’ you know

*[Laughs]*

You know when they dump it there was dozens of just old tires and rubble and it just things like it had been used as a dumping ground by people of the area for ages so they kind of cleared all that up and erm there was like an ongoing project to try and build a playground out of stuff it didn’t really get very far to be honest erm then of course there’s the fire pit in the middle erm constantly arguing who has to make the tea and things like that or to do the washing up as ever [takes a drink] and erm it was sort yeah playing at playing at camping I guess erm in an urban environment and it was always again at least a dozen people there

*And where you spending a lot of time there?*

Spending a lot of time there erm Richey who I mentioned earlier had a worst built treehouse in the world so I decided to share it with him and like were other treehouses tended to involve the careful laying out of plants to create a base his just really was a couple of mattresses hung up over like a central arch of the tree it was some polypeptide above it erm

*[Laughs]*

And it was fairly low down so I used to sleep on my mattress like that cause it was like there

*[Laughs]*

And if somebody wanted to come talk to you and I was asleep and they’d pull themselves up and pull a leg [laughs] ridiculous time and I think to myself ‘how did you’ I spent a lot of time asleep there because being a teenage boy you sleep a lot you now it was like with the Green Man Roundabout sort of ten metres that way and the trains going past there and you know but er that’s kind of fun time there was a lot of camaraderie there erm and it was always people just hanging out really erm you kind of at this sort of stage you sort of felt like this was the last gasp really you know and we all knew that after they evicted green mania that would be it really there would really be anywhere else to go particularly erm and…I really enjoyed there but I missed the eviction because it kind of started to go a bit sour we had a load of people show in vans and buses and like who were start of the archetypal sort of new age traveller group you know and this bunch of people they were quite aggressive and it they really sort of domineered the camp and a lot of a lot of the regular visitors stopped going because there was like leaving a lot of mess everywhere there was people on smack all over the place erm nobody would do any work and you know this bunch showed just rude and aggressive to a lot of people. So I stopped going because I didn’t feel comfortable there anymore erm and the next the next time I went was kind of three or four weeks later when it was evicted erm the late I don’t know when it was I can’t remember…late September beginning of October I think?

*Late September beginning of October in ninety six*

Ninety six I think yeah

*Yeah okay*

Yeah I think so unless I’ve got confused and it was all nah it wasn’t just a few months so yeah so erm I missed the eviction for that I got there after the police lines already got up erm and all the people who like the kind of the traveller group people none of them stayed for the eviction or anything like that which is kind of it sucked really

*Hmmm were they there when the police turned up?*

No they had all gone they stayed they stayed around for maybe two weeks until everyone got really annoyed, I was told there was some violence but I don’t if that was true or not you know. There’s always there always kind of drama going on you hear rumours of violence happened between somebody and somebody else you know erm because it a movements like this kind of there’s a hard core sort of traditional activist what seemed to be a traditional activist back there with dreadlocks and the indigent life style and things like that and erm they were the public face they were the public face because the media made it so partially nobody was interested in doing like the views of anybody of who didn’t look like who wasn’t even a little old lady or didn’t have dreadlocks erm but there’s also a lot of people involved who worked normal jobs and didn’t tend to live on the sights but they would show up for actions and they supported with administrative support things like that you know like the the traditional the dreadlock types were just the ones who could dedicate all their time to it you know because they’d chosen to live that way you know but don’t kind of let anybody tell you that they were the only people involved at all they were just the ones you saw all the time so there was lots of other people around and you know when when this sort of the travellers who weren’t environmentalists for whom their own personal problems meant that they weren’t very sociable you know in a positive way I am sure if you talked to other people there would be friends with some of the people who were there that I am kind of badmouthing. I found them very intimidating erm but other people might of thought they were brilliant

*Hmm*

And you know so yeah so you know I was a bit annoyed these people showed up and then made everything bad vibes and buggered off again [laughs] erm there’s always people in these sort of things who don’t want to do any work whether they are the sort of people are kind of too shy to put themselves forward and you know waiting to be told to do something or whether they’re people who don’t realise they’re slacking off you know like ‘having a rest’ ‘just going to do something in a bit’ or there’s people who just they are attracted to…you know there’s you get a lot of people with mental health problems who come down and join in

*Why do you think that is?*

Because people with mental health problems basically live a lot of their lives out in public or some some certain mental health problems and they see something going on and they just kind of bumble in and join in and the protest movement historically and recently haven’t been very good at saying actually your not contributing you don’t believe in this your not well bugger off. And because they tend for the most part be utopians and say well you know alright this bloke doesn’t really do anything except drink and shout at people but you know we can’t like force them to go anywhere because that would be like very fascist and so you would end up with a situation where your running a protest group and social services at the same time but nobody’s got any training in social services and nobody’s able to set parameters and that becomes quite intimidating you know I’ve seen it happen erm then and I saw it again at the occupy movement a couple of years ago which I was staying there for a while you know and it is difficult to help who you know street drinkers alcoholics and junkies who come who are attracted by presumably the idea of comradery and having people around them you know I I know of at least one person who turned into a very addict er very good activist after having joined the groups just because they wanted somewhere to be an addict in

*Hmmm*

But you know that sometimes can be very intimidating

*Hmm*

And it leaves you to question people’s commitment

*And how did it how was sort of fitting in with your own emotional difficulties you know your anxiety and panic attacks, how was that feeding into that sort of thing?*

Well it made me not want to go into the green mania anymore which was a shame because I’d really enjoyed it there but it was like a quite ugly you know erm

*But do you think that like at Willow Brook for example that had eased your…*

Yeah it been a very positive experience for me I felt part of it and I felt you know I was a erm know a recognised face at green mania for the most part you know people knew who I was but I was one of the green mania people

*Hmmm*

You know there was quite a lot of young people who hung around with the various groups

*That was my phone sorry I think*

Sixteen sixteen I am expecting because I said to a friend of mine who works in Ilford that I’d er catch up with him, I’ll just reply to this text

*Of course you can yeah*

Erm

*So that was just a text message coming through for the sake of the tape [laughs] are you in a do you need to go at*

I have to leave about five yeah

*Okay fine*

I don’t think there’s much more to be honest but erm

*What time did you say it was now?*

It is coming up to twenty past four

*Okay fine*

Right I met have more time if he decides he doesn’t want to wait erm yeah so that was quite intimidating and I was having a lot of mental health problems on and off more on than off at the time and erm I found green mania to be very sort of very nice peaceful place you know

*Hmmm*

And mostly what happened at green mania we sat around a fire and sort just hung out in the you know and occasionally there was a good rave there and what not erm which is kind of the first raves I went to was through there and at the time I was really into heavy metal and what not but [laughs] picked up a bit of a taste for the electronic music there

*[Laughs]*

Erm yeah I spent my twenties just raving all the time erm yeah so I guess I think I was more mentally ill during that late period erm and increasingly my mental health was suffering erm you know late ninety six I was kind of really unwell and probably could have been section to be honest I was delusional and paranoid and argh horrible times

*Can I ask what what form it was taking?*

Erm mostly, I was just really really depressed you know I was kinda just paranoid. I was suicidal, I was convinced that you know I was going to die soon and you know as it got worse I was er I went through a period where I believed I was being followed by werewolves things like that just like nonsense. One day I was walking around the streets and there was some children playing and I could see that I could see their skulls… like glowing through their skin and I just thought fucking hell I am not well you know [laughs] I didn’t really have a plan I didn’t know how I was going to get through it you know er

*And you were still living at home at this point?*

I was yeah my relationship with my mum was it was sort of frail at times simply because I was coming and going all hours I was drinking smoking weed all the time and wasn’t looking after myself you know I didn’t have any plans about what I was going to do. I was always talking about death and self-harming and…just I came and went you know like I was not well at all so it took a long time to get better really erm [drinks water] and yeah so I couldn’t really devote myself what I wanted to do in my my sort of vague plan was that I was going to see out the winter ninety six and then I was gonna go er off to Newbury and join what was left of the protest up there because most of it had already been evicted by then. I spent a week at Newbury in…ninety six spring of ninety six and I was going to go back there erm and try and catch up with the tail end of the protest there see were that took me and XXXX I was gonna go and go and become a travelling road protester but I didn’t get any further than living this stupid squat in in Leytonstone er in Leyton and just I got sicker and sicker at the time I was convinced I was being followed all the time and we’re often living without electricity and I was stealing food from the supermarket to eat and I had no idea about benefits or anything like no idea nobody had ever told me how to claim benefits or what you had to do no idea so that was pretty shit

*And were you in touch still with anybody from the the road protest days you know green mania?*

No once that had gone everybody sort of disappeared and went their own ways and I wasn’t close enough friends with anybody to stay in touch. I think er I think I have Richey’s number but also I was mental and just didn’t know I was scared to use a phone wasn’t until I was in my twenties that I started using and be more confident with a telephone [laughs] you know erm I found it very hard it very hard to get in touch with people that I did want to keep in touch with erm so yeah I didn’t keep in touch with any of them I’ve sort of bumped into a few of them when I got a bit better I went to college to do some sort of part time A-Levels and bumped into a couple of the younger kids erm who’d ended up there and we sort of hung at vaguely went to the same parties and things over the course of that year

*Hmm*

Erm but until you know until Facebook I didn’t get back in touch with anybody at all from that sort of period and most of the most of the people my age there er that I talked to from the protests kind of not really involved in politics anymore beyond sort of sharing things n Facebook and what not so you know I kind of have to go off in a different direction again sort of thing

*Yeah sure, so so tell me tell me the the the horrible squat you were living in and what was going on there?*

Erm, all it was really was that my one of my friends erm I don’t know her boyfriend lived in er Bakers Arms and he was a bit of psychopath as it turns out, he’s one of these people whose very good at making everyone feel like their friends and stuff so he like ‘oh yeah move move in here’ erm and it turned out it wasn’t like you know a leased place or anything it was just somewhere he was living. We lived under the threat of eviction on the whole time and then he buggered off to Nottingham to where my friend at the time was living and las I heard of him he was in prison erm I don’t really want to talk about but it was [mumbles] fucking horrible and so it was just like a three room flat and cats there he picked up from somewhere and you know he’d been dealing smack out of the place a while back so there was always people showing up you know for various reasons who know no smack here go away sort of thing erm and then at one point he erm he had I lost my keys so I was climbing in and out through the front window erm which involved kind of the slatted windows at the top, I don’t know why the police never came around there you go yeah it’s just a really unhelp it was like it was like my brain had picked the most re…stupid thing to do but there was no telling me at the time I was determined I was going to live out you know I was going to stay here for a bit and then I am going to go off travelling when it gets a bit warmer but instead I just ended up in this fucking cold unlit flat on my own were the guy I was living with had kind of taken most of his belongings and buggered off and he was like ‘look after it for me until I get back’ sort of thing with no phone and nobody came around because you know it was miles away from East London and nobody could make plans or anything that and the cats always needed feeding they always needed cleaning up and I was just I dunno really I was going absolutely crazy and one night I couldn’t take it anymore and I went hopped on my bike and cycled back to my mums house and like it’s about four or five in the morning you now woke her up and was like [makes crying noise] you know it was a film it would been a beautiful sort of reconciliation but really I was just sort of so unwell I couldn’t control I was just crying and came back in you know my mum accepted me back in and like I had to sleep on a mattress on the floor in one of my brother rooms because my room was being used now [laughs] and er you know slowly got my mental health back a little bit but erm you know it was a it was a very bad period of time then and I think like ninety six was probably the lowest I’d got for a long time erm and I dunno I guess I guess part of it the the the protest you know it was a…it became a bigger thing for me in retrospect you know at the time it was just something I was doing and wasn’t and I was beating myself up for not being better at it as if there was a sort of standard that you had to be and like hoping that we’d win but we couldn’t win we’d already lost you know [laughs] and so that’s that sort of hiding to nothing sort of side of things as well erm and that I guess that is really it I suppose [laughs]

*No no that’s that’s great that’s really good detail but can I just ask a little bit about you know the years since those days and like how maybe I am particularly interested in what impact that period of your life has had on you know your later life and how it shaped your politics?*

Hmmm

*Or your lifestyle and…*

I guess for me it was kind of my entry into politics erm over the I went to university in the end of ninety seven and erm I went to Middlesex in London Tottenham and I stayed involved vaguely in sort of student politics stuff that most I I wasn’t doing anything to organise it was just going demos you know and arranging petitions and letter writing campaigns and stuff for the student union and then nothing very sort of hardcore or anything like that erm then after university my then partner and I moved down to south coast and that was about the time the Iraq war was all kicking off and I joined a small group of anarchists down there and we started something called Worthing Against War and we did we tried to do a lot of anti-war campaigning and that became my life for the best part of a year erm organising fundraisers leafleting and getting up in the morning to do demonstrations outside of buildings then going off to work then coming back and doing other things. And it was it burnt me out completely erm again by the end of it I became really paranoid erm but I was being followed around by the police you couldn’t small time you know and like everywhere you go there would be police people coming around and knocking on the door for spurious reasons and I got really really paranoid and paranoid is not really a very good thing to have with me mental health [laughs] so erm I was like ‘right I can’t do this anymore’ and I sort of stayed out of politics for the most part like being activis…er doing activism for years erm moved back to London split up with my partner erm started a teaching training course that for a little while stopped doing that erm

*What were you studying at university?*

I did literature and philosophy erm I didn’t really have any aim in mind you know but that was just the things I liked. It did because those sort of things all I ever did I choose modules were I already knew enough about it so I did fuck all work and just ended up writing essays about stuff I already knew about so [laughs] it was a bit of waste of time really you know there was no academic rigour involved and it wasn’t a very good university erm so that was kind of a waste of time to be honest erm yeah and er I spent my twenties mostly ah I was in a relationship with somebody I nearly got married too but that did work out erm and I did teacher training and I dropped out of that essentially because I was drunk then I er after after I dropped out of that I went on a sort of few month bender [car noises in background] erm went off to New York for a week’s [laughs] spent loads of money on my credit cards that I didn’t have and then came back and booked myself into a recovery group for a while erm sort of got a handle on that and then erm…lived in East London with various friends and did lots and lots of raving moved loads and loads of drugs for like five six seven years erm move down to Brix…when my East London friends got a bit bored of that sort of lifestyle I moved down to Brixton with people I knew off the internet to continue it for another few years erm lets have a loo I wound up I paid for myself mostly by temping and then I started working social housing which I still do erm balance sort of working with having an on off drug habit for years and years and years erm sort of got clean about after a sort of after many years of hard work and detoxes and stuff in twenty ten and been drug free since then so that’s alright ah these days live in Anerley with my partner of four years erm I only work part time now so I am not well enough to hold a full time job but I do data analysis for XXXX housing which I am quite good at erm my I’ve been involved in politics to a certain degree erm I was at when I erm doing stuff with Occupy

*Hmmm*

I helped set several Occupy camp in London and sort of organised that for a little while I helped organise it erm and what other stuff have I been involved in doing some help my partner is involved in Justice for Women she does a lot of work with them and they have been kind doing some stuff in the back back room helping helping them primarily erm she’s taking a break from that now to study so we’ve kind of not got any anything fixed that we’re doing

*Hmmm*

At the moment and sort of I found that for me I don’t want to be doing sort of frontline stuff really [drinks water] erm I don’t mind sort manning the barricades as it where and I don’t mind doing the sort of backroom organising but I don’t really want to be you know kind of doing the out-reach as it were like having I got a bit burnt out with the Occupy stuff

*Hmmm*

Just wrangling you know like again the disconnect between the brew crew and the people who people who have a million ideas but nobody wants to do any work you know like all this consensus decision making and how it just meant that absolutely even nothing got done I used to live it when people got together for the general big circles and like except for about five or six of us who had like an hour and a half while all the others were arguing about consensus decision making we went out and actually got stuff done you know

Yeah I wanted to ask about the sort of political those [gasps] meeting processes and how I just wondered if you can talk a little bit more about the consensus decision making and what that look you know what that looks like and how you responded to it

Well I mean…we didn’t really have so much consensus decision making at the M11 Link erm because consensus decision making kind of informal way erm has taken off in recent years and I I think it’s a nice naïve idea but all every really turns into is like a huge argument and then the same people do it anyway you know and the way I look at it that if I am the person who’s going to have to the dam work because nobody else can be arsed to do it then I am going to do it the way I know works even if you think you’ve got a better idea [laughs] you know and that’s like bloody mindlessness because that’s kind of its anti-democratic and what but the simple truth is I’ve lived on these camps before and know how it works you know it like everybody’s like ‘yes we need agree we all do shifts all night long so that there’s always two or three people awake’ right but what ends up happening is all the people who’ve agreed that go to bed

*[Laughs]*

Don’t they? You know and it’s like…trying to get the groups together to like get their shit together to organise a toilet and in the end like consensus decision making is a fine idea but really all it is is there will always be at these things a group of people who know what how to do things and they will do it and other peoples input will be appreciated and their help will be appreciated and they’ll probably be willing to listen to discussions about it but like everybody everybody’s opinion being valid and equal no matter how little about the subject doesn’t really work you know like I guess I feel like erm it seemed really useless to me erm because like what all every happens is that the consensus is we’ll appoint a working party and the working party is people who wanted to get it done two days ago and they’ll come back and say ‘right we need to do this’ and everybody agrees and but you could of agreed that two or three days ago when somebody says ‘we need to do this and I know to do it so we’ll do it’ erm and I got thoroughly cheesed off with it because all it ever is it’s the egotists talk for ages and ages and ages and have a massive argument everybody else is going like a drinking game and the same people have to do it’s just more convoluted I I didn’t like consensus decision making you know it it formalised it formalised and added rules to process that didn’t need formalising because your like ‘we need a toilet what are we going to do?’ somebody says ‘well I’ll er I’ll phone and book a portaloo and pay for it out of donations jar’ that’s brilliant we don’t need to have a sixteen people discussion whether or not it’s better to do this or to spend the money on something else and carry on using the toilets at Starbucks and you know and should we be paying for this out of that and who’s gonna do it ‘I vote you do it’ you’ve you know it’s like we we sort of got things done without it before you know and all it does it gives the people it gives people who don’t intend to do any work the illusion of being part of it and that’s kinda quite good I you see people come out of themselves as they discuss stuff like that but you know it just became funny because the half dozen people at the second protest camp at Occupy just who actually knew how to do things just actually knew how to do things and just got on and did it while everybody else is having their consensus decision making

*Hmmm*

[Laughs] and er then it also you know I’ve got quite a lot complaints about doing….because it was a pointless demo it was a demo just say we’re upset about things but it was disunified

*Hang on which demo?*

Er sorry the Occupy stuff

*The occu…all of the Occupy? Everything?*

Yes it was you know it was we don’t like this but there was no sort of unified response to it erm but I am ranting now I don’t think Occupy are sort in the remit [Laughs]

*Well er it can be, it totally can be*

But yeah my experience is there from from the M11 stuff helped me much later on you know it it taught me about stuff not to do it taught me about stuff what to do erm and it kind of it was funny because I was seeing sort of kids who were sixteen and seventeen at Occupy and being reminded of myself you know and so I kind of tried to make a point of encouraging them a little bit more you know and like…I dunno my girlfriend took the piss because there’s like you go and talk to them and there all like ‘ohhh big grown up activist man talk to me’ sort of thing but I mean that kind of how I felt one of the seasons protesters aimed to talk to me at the M11 so you know you try and pass on useful bits of the information that you’ve picked up over the years maybe it will work a bit better in the future I don’t know [laughs]

*Erm okay so then my final my very final question is just erm…er how does it how do you feel now looking back at that time what’s does it?*

I am very proud of it I guess I mean I liked my my version my story from it to be a little more like you know I did a lot more er I gave more of myself to it you know erm I wish that I’d been kinda of braver and you know made made some decisions to get involved with it and make my life revolve around that rather than try and dip in and out and try and maintain you know er because I didn’t give more of myself to it because I was scarred or you know dropping out entirely of of you know what would happen if I don’t finish my A-Levels well the answer was absolutely sod all you know like I was scared to make a decision and erm I kinda wanted to have it both ways but I look back now what I would like to of done is just gone and lived at Claremont Rd and stayed there full time and kind of treated more as a proper apprenticeship in life rather than you know just dipped in and out erm you know and then I could of come back later on and sort of got my shit together when I was ready for it. I think I could have been a bit more forgiving of myself not try to do too much erm both you know try try maintain a school education I wasn’t interested in and you know my own mental health and stuff. I coulda just picked one of them and stayed with it rather than you know I am very proud of it I think it’s a very important period of British history and it taught me a lot of things like practical stuff erm but also you know observing how we were talked about in the media like these days if you read a references to it, it’s kind of I dunno it’s like there a golden age of British protest you know like I am but at the time they treated us with absolute contempt you know like I was looking through some of those even places like The Guardian you know a reputation for being liberals just just drips of contempt

*Hmmm*

You know and like I guess everybody’s history gets it kinda of becomes a soft glow when it’s no longer dangerous we can all talk about what a wonderful thing it was but actually at the time it was cold and miserable and the media hates us and they patronised the shit out of us and every time they put people on the T.V they’d find the person who was the drunkest person who couldn’t do up their own clothes properly and like present them as like the mouthpiece of the organisation you know and but yeah I am proud it I am proud of what we did you know we slowed it down we forced a re-think a critical re-think into roads policies you know we cost them a lot of money and a lot of time and I yeah I am proud of it and that I guess is that

*Is that that?*

Unless you’ve got another question [laughs]

*No no I haven’t no no I haven’t I haven’t got another*

I am kinda talked out [laughs]

*My only other question which is the question I use at the end I say at the end of every single interview just is there anything I haven’t asked you?*

Erm I…

*That you feel like you wanted to talk about*

[Laughs] I am all talked out I couldn’t possible think of anything else now

*Okay*

Erm this has been er it’s kind of half therapy session and half reminiscing so you know I am afraid I sort of tangent a bit about my mental health a lot but

*No that’s absolutely fine*

[Laughs] I am afraid it’s rather central to my to my own experience you know. I’ve got to…see if my mates buggered off [phone rings]

*I’ll turn this off now than shall I? Thank ever so much*

**Interview Details**

**Name of interviewee: Paul White**

**Project: Voices of Leytonstonia**

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