

Telling Our Stories Finding Our Roots

DEVON'S MULTICULTURAL HISTORY
ILFRACOMBE

INTERVIEW WITH RACHAEL SMITH

INTERVIEWER: ABI OBENE
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0:00:02.3 Abi Obene: Okay, so we are here on the 27th of July 2024 for the Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots project, based in Ilfracombe, which is a project funded by Devon Development Education and also by the National Lottery. Joined here today by Rachael.

0:00:21.9 Rachael Smith: Hello.

0:00:23.4 Abi: Hello. Who's very, very graciously agreed to have a chat with us. My name is Abi. I'm the project coordinator for the project, and yes, we'll just have a chat, see where it goes. We are also joined by Rachael's cat. So, if you hear a little bit of rumbling in the background, that'll be him!

0:00:45.8 Rachael: Jasper.

0:00:47.2 Abi: Jasper, who's the third person in the room. Yes, I suppose we'll just get started. So, I suppose we could start at the beginning. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about your childhood and what it was like growing up. Are there any particularly memorable childhood experiences that you recall?

0:01:09.5 Rachael: Well, I was born in Hemel Hempstead, and that was very much a new town, so it was a very mixed place. It was a lot of new houses, a lot of new estates but also a lot of fields and woodland, so yes, it was quite mixed, really. I only ever lived at three houses there, really. So I didn't live in many houses. Some people travel at the time. So I ended up in a place called Hill Common in Bennetts End after my first house, which was in Ritcroft Street. I think I moved there when I was about four, three, four, and the school was literally at the end of the road. So both my secondary school and my junior school and my infants were all literally at the end of the road, so that was easy. I suppose you just get to play with all the kids. In those days you'd just go out and play. That's what you'd do.

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0:02:24.2 Abi: You go out as the sun came up and...

0:02:24.9 Rachael: You became a bit wild really. You'd just go out and we'd play in the fields, we'd make straw camps.

0:02:36.3 Abi: Straw camps?

0:02:36.1 Rachael: Yes. We'd get chased by the farmer with a gun. [Laughter]. Get off my land. We wouldn't take any of the straw that was baled, but we'd just take all the leftover stuff, and we'd mix sticks and frames and make all these tunnel camps that we used to do, but they didn't like us doing it. So we'd just spend the whole day out really, every day, all day of the summer, just would come back with straw up our noses and black. My identity as a Romany - it's weird, and I've been talking to my brother lately about it, that I remember being told not to tell anybody. I remember being told to hide it, and when people ever mentioned it or they did find out it was something that was frowned upon, to say the least, and yes, teased. I've recently found out that I was taught Romany and to speak it, but I have no recollection of that. Probably because I was really drummed in to hide it and not let anybody know somehow I've repressed it, I think.

0:03:58.3 Abi: Yes. Was that family saying not to?

0:04:01.6 Rachael: Yes, my father. So even though he was very much a Romany, he tried to really assimilate into, I suppose, normal English culture. He did a lot of gamekeeping. He was very knowledgeable about animals and woodland and nature and survival, so he knew how to tickle trout, and he could be a good poacher, basically [laughter] and catch rabbits and any way of surviving you could think about. He knew about herbs and pulses and so that rubbed off without him really teaching it, if that makes sense. So we'd always go to the woods, and I'd always be taken - in those days, there was always signs everywhere saying, 'Private property. Do not trespass.' My dad would trespass, and he'd just say, 'It's everybody's land. You can't own land. Land is for everybody.' So he very much had this belief in freedom, really, I suppose, but never harming where you go. So his whole philosophy, which I now know is more the Romany philosophy is that you leave everything untouched. So no matter what you do, you only take what you need, and you never take more than you need, and you don't leave anywhere looking like you've been there.

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0:05:51.0 So that is a cultural belief really, which is now we see as environmentally good, but that's the way that he taught me to live, and so no matter where I went in life, I always had this thing about I must leave somewhere better than when I found it or the same. So yes, it was a kind of cultural, but I didn't realise that was linked to his culture as such. I just thought it was a...

0:06:26.3 Abi: So would he not really talk about anything, specifically naming things being around him?

0:06:33.5 Rachael: No. So it would never be named. It was almost, if anything, disguised, I would say quite often. I know that he did horse whispering, and my brother did as well.

0:06:50.1 Abi: What's horse whispering?

0:06:52.1 Rachael: Basically, you can calm a horse, and you can even get it to lay down. You can do anything with it. You can treat it. So yes, they both did that. My brother actually went horse-drawn. I'm trying to think what age he was. He was probably early 20s. So he had a caravan and went horse-drawn, a roll top, I think they call them, barrel top, roll top. Yes, and he went for a few years like that, but he spent most of his life living in a wood anyway really. It's only the last about four or five years, I think, he's gone into a house because he's had pneumonia and a lot of health conditions, and he doesn't look after himself particularly well. So, yes, he's had to revert to somewhere more stable, I suppose.

0:07:58.3 Abi: Did he just go between a few different spots, or was he mostly static with his [over speaking 0:08:06.8]?

0:08:07.3 Rachael: He did a lot of environmental activism. I know Tesco's didn't like him very much. He cost them a lot of money. So he used to go up trees and stay in trees for weeks on end and things, and I know he stopped - I think there's a road in Ireland that they stopped being built, a motorway, at one point. So yes, he was very big in that world and did a lot, but he would try and stay out of publicity and out of media and things like that because he wasn't the most conventional of people. So yes, he would try and just stay back from it all and from being seen again somehow. We started when we were probably teenagers and started going on anti-fox hunt things and protests and stuff like that, and he just got more and more into it, but yes then really when most people were

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starting to get houses or do that, he then did the opposite and started living in benders, which I did a bit of, but he stayed there, and I didn't. I moved on and he didn't - not saying that isn't moving on, but that's the lifestyle he chose. So he had babies in benders and things like that. I suppose you'd call it bushcraft these days, but that's the way he lived. It wasn't a hobby or a weekend thing. That was his lifestyle, and that's where he stayed really.

0:10:07.2 So I wouldn't say we lost touch, but I'd like to catch up more because he knows more about our family history than I do. Maybe that's just because I was a couple of years younger. I'm not sure. He was also taught to box, and I wasn't meant to because I was a girl, but I remember desperately wanting to box, so he taught me on the quiet when we were kids because, yes, my dad wouldn't take me boxing. It was just not done for girls to do things like that. Yes, so my dad used to do bare-knuckle fighting as well. I know that one of our relatives is a champion in bare-knuckle fighting. I think it's a great-great-grandfather who was an English champion bare-knuckle. So, yes, there's some strange - but that's very much a Romany thing as well. My dad always had this thing about, 'You don't call the police. You sort something out yourself between yourselves. You don't escalate it any bigger. You sort it out.' So that, again, was a very much a philosophy of Romany ways, really. You don't make it into a massive thing. You are just there and then you deal with it. Hit each other until somebody's wrong and somebody's right. [Laughter]. I don't know.

0:11:43.1 Abi: If it works. [Laughter]

0:11:45.5 Rachael: It was just the way of the culture. It's very much that's how you'd settle disputes. You wouldn't get a knife. You wouldn't get a weapon. You'd just hit each other. So it was very primal in a way, and my father was very fit, primal man. Yes, I remember realising that people were quite frightened of him, and he wasn't somebody who raised his voice or spoke loudly, but he obviously had a bit of a presence. He would do local bouncing for gigs and things like that. So they'd call him in to do things. He was quite an adaptable person for somebody who'd probably never really been schooled because I don't know how much schooling he actually had. I don't think it was a lot. He worked on estates for landowners clearing rabbits and doing things like that, but he also was a builder as well. He seemed to turn his hand to most things, really, if he needed to. Yes, he was a very strong man and looked almost North American Indian almost, very dark-skinned but bright blue eyes and dark hair. So, yes, not like me.

0:13:25.4 Abi: Do you know how your parents met? So I take it your mother wasn't Romany?

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0:13:29.4 Rachael: They met at a dance, which I think most people did in those days from what I can figure out. I think it was in Berkhamsted. I'm not sure. I presume it was because my mother didn't live in Hemel, so I presume it was in Berkhamsted, which I spent a lot of my childhood as well. Yes, and as far as I know, it was a dance, and they were quite young, really. I think my mum was only about 19. So, they were married - I think, I'm not sure, she must have been about 20. So yes, it's quite young and I've recently just got pictures out of my father and mother because I've been going through all this stuff, and you can see he's a very different man to the man I knew. He looks quite out of place in the world a little bit, a little bit like a wild animal that's been captured. Yes, you can see it in his eyes, this sort of what's going on almost. Even though it was something he obviously wanted. I think my mum lived in a very different world to a world he knew, and it was probably quite frightening because she was quite educated. My nan's family were, I suppose you'd say, middle class.

0:15:09.8 So there was a massive social difference between them. It was poles apart, as I say, houses, styles. My nan was, 'Oh, darling, hello,' and my little nan was, as I say, cigarette hanging out the mouth and just very, very different, very different social worlds. My other granddad was an upholsterer. I don't know what my other granddad did. I know he liked the horses and things like that. So there'd always be a newspaper, or they liked betting and things, which was, again, poles apart from socially what I'd seen in my nan's house, which was more having dinner with local bank managers and that kind of thing.

0:16:18.1 Abi: So it was very much two different worlds that you and your brother grew up in?

0:16:24.2 Rachael: Two different worlds, completely, yes. Yes, completely two different worlds. We spent more time with my big nan than we did my little nan because my mum then worked for my grandfather, who had an upholstery shop in Berkhamsted. So I was brought up around upholstery a lot and quite creative really. There was an old mill on the way to Berkhamsted that he had all his foam in. I remember we used to go and play in it. It was a whole room full of foam. We used to go and jump about in this foam room, get told off. In the shop, I used to tidy up and I learned to sew very young. So I learned - which I haven't done for years now - but I learned to sew on a big electric treadle Singer sewing machine, industrial one and then hand stitched the bottom of... So he did things like Champneys, which is a big spa place. He did all their curtains and their upholstery. So he was well known as a top-end upholsterer, really. So I used to help make the lampshades to match the curtains and the pelmets and things like that and tidy up, and I loved it. I loved all the material samples.

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0:17:50.4 I knew everybody in the high street of Berkhamsted because they were shop owners. I knew all the other shopkeepers. So I used to go to the pet shop all the time, play with the pets and over the road to the toy shop, which was called the Toy Box. The lady there used to take me out in her sports car - she didn't have any children - whizz me around, just spoiling me really. So I had quite a nice childhood in that way. I used to run around, and we'd play - there was a woodyard, and we used to go and knock up little boats and then play in the canals with them. So my life in Berkhamsted was quite idyllic. My life in Hemel wasn't quite so idyllic. My parents themselves didn't get on generally. There was domestic violence. It was quite a tumultuous relationship, really. I think that was because of the social class thing. My father would get work from going to the pub and obviously, because in those days you didn't have CVs, and you didn't have - so that's where he'd get his work from. My mum didn't like him going to the pub, so then they'd argue about that.

0:19:13.9 So there was this whole, again, social class way of being that was normal for my father to act one way and my mother to be another, really. I suppose my first experience I remember calling the police was the first time I used a telephone. So in one way, I had this very idyllic thing going on, and in another way it was really disruptive and again, never told anybody. So it wasn't until I was 15 I even told a friend. So we didn't have many people home just in case they would fight. So outwardly everything looked perfect or good. We had a lovely home. We had ~~John Lewis~~ **William Morris** [amended by interviewee post-interview] wallpaper, so we had a really nice home. My father was quite house-proud. Again, that's a very Romany thing, this huge house proudness. He used to deal in antiques, so we had a lot of grandfather clocks and beautiful things, and he'd buy my mum jewellery. So, yes, from an outward perspective, they were both doing really well, but from an internal perspective, it wasn't a particularly happy home.

0:20:35.8 So I think escaping to the fields and being out was the way I coped with it and drawing. So from a very young age, I drew, and that was a world that kept me safe, I think. It was my own world, and so it was a world I could go into that I knew that I was safe in, and it was something that I seemed to be quite good at. So, yes, from quite a young age, that's what I focused on really, just doing art. I think it did, it gave me a safe space somewhere that helped me survive. I'm not sure my brother found that quite so easily. I'm not sure whether boys find it more difficult, whether it's a genetic thing. I haven't got a clue. He found it a lot harder than I did. So he would ignore it more, but he found it harder, whereas I would face it front on, so I would get up and try and stop the rows. From a very young age, I would try and break them up. So I became a fixer as well. So that became almost my role. I became this fixer. So it doesn't surprise me that later on in my life, I became a counsellor at

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one point. Yes, he didn't cope with it so well, and I think that troubled him as he got older as well, that he didn't know how to fix or stop it, not that it is fixable.

0:22:26.3 So yes, we moved from that house when I was about 11, I think, and we moved to a Victorian house in the old town of Hemel Hempstead, which was really nice, and things carried on as they were a little bit. Obviously, I didn't go playing in the fields. I was getting bigger. By the time I was 15 - my mum wanted to divorce long before that, but I remember her going when I probably was about seven or eight to try and get one, and the solicitor said - she said it was domestic abuse. He said, 'Well, what do you expect? You're his wife. He can do what he wants.' So that was very much the attitude of, I suppose, the '70s. Sixties, seventies was you're kind of property and put up and shut up, really. So she found that wasn't very easy. So until I got to the '80s when divorce started becoming a lot more normal, and then she filed for divorce then when I was about 15. That coincided with my dad's parents dying. My dad just disappeared. He went off to live in, I think, it was either the Isle of Man or the Isle of Wight.

0:24:10.4 Abi: Do you know what he...

0:24:14.2 Rachael: He just went and worked over there and just - I think as much as they didn't get on, I think for both of them it was the collapse of a family, so it was the structure, and I don't think in a way either of them really knew what to do, even though my mum wanted it. My mum then suddenly decided she would be a teenager, really. I don't know about decided but started behaving more like a teenager, and she started actually giving me and my brother drugs and things like that. So not your normal sort of thing, really, at 15, but saying that I've heard of people do this still, but it's not something I'd approve of or in hindsight think is a good thing, but when you're 15, you're 15, and your influences are very different.

0:25:18.1 Abi: Yes, and if you grew up in an environment where you're given drugs...

0:25:23.4 Rachael: Well, I'd never seen them before that. So it wasn't like with my father it was like that, but it's flipped when she divorced. Then she ended up getting together with one of my brother's friends. So yes, quite unusual. So I think she was about 39. I think he was 19. So there was a large gap, and my home life completely turned on its head, really. I ended up having a very serious sexual assault, which - well, a rape, and that affected me quite a lot at that point because I didn't feel my mum was very there for me. She wasn't very there, to be honest, and looking back, I think she had

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mental health issues, but in those days things like that weren't really picked up upon. My brother had a bit of a breakdown as well, at a similar time just after that, and that again wasn't picked up on. He had a catatonic trauma, which is quite severe, and they gave him two Valium, I think, the doctor, and said, 'Don't worry about it. You'll be fine the next day.' Yes, it's very funny looking back and seeing what little attention was given to emotional issues. People didn't even go for therapy. It just wasn't part of life. It was put up, shut up and get on with it, really.

0:27:18.9 So I then went without realising it - I was still smoking and things, but I quite quickly decided that I needed - I'd had spiritual experiences from a young age. So from a very, very young age, as far as I remember, I always remember seeing dead people. The first time I spoke about it was I must have been about six, and I was out with my auntie Eileen, again, very well-to-do lady with her beagle, [?Katie], and we were in Berkhamsted, and we went walking Katie. I used to love this. She was so racy. She had this red, I think, Cooper S. Is it Mini Cooper S soft top? She was so, again very, 'My darling, darling', but she was such fun, Auntie Eileen, she really was. Anyway, we went walking Katie, and we got to this field, and I just remember seeing this battle, and I was horrified because I'd seen things before but not to that scale. So I was standing there very frozen, I suppose, in like what's going on, and the dog was going nuts with me as well at where I could see it.

0:28:54.6 So obviously my auntie turned to me and said, 'What can you see? Darling, what can you see?' I described exactly what they looked like. They were wearing quite distinguished jackets and hats and all of it, swords, and she just said, 'Oh my God, you're so right. This is called - I think she called it - what was it called? Oh, I can't remember the name, but it was a known battlefield, but I didn't know that. I was only six. I'd never been there before. So she just turned to me and said, 'My God, don't ever tell anybody what you see.' Again another kept secret. Hold it in. She said, 'They won't like it.' She said, 'They won't like it, and they won't like what you...' In those days I suppose they would just lock me up, think that I was mentally ill, so that would have been a normal reaction to something like that as well. So I learned to keep all these experiences I was seeing very - I didn't even tell my mum. I just kept them very quiet.

0:30:19.9 So my auntie lived in a place called Bottom Farm in Berkhamsted, which was a 16th - well, it might even be more than a 16th century. It was an old farm, and every time we were there, I'd ask if they could go to the toilet with me. My mum and my auntie would always go with me, and it got to the point where I got to about 15 and they said to me, 'You're 15 now. Why do we need to go to the toilet with you?' I just said, 'Look, you've got a guy, and he hangs over your stairs. He's hung, and he's hanging over the stairs, and I have to go through him, and it freaks me out every time I have to just walk through to get to the toilet.' My auntie's face was just like, oh, my God, I've always known

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something was here, but I've never known what. It was weird because I thought in those days there were ghosts, and they could hurt me. So they frightened me. I grew up, I suppose, quite frightened that these things would get me because they felt very real to me, and they felt very present and there, and I visually would see them like I'm seeing you, and so I wouldn't know what to do with them.

0:31:41.7 So quite young, as soon as I got to 17, 18, I decided that I wanted to know more about what was going on, and I wanted to know more religiously. I tried going to Sunday school. I tried praying for these things to stop appearing. So I used to take myself to Sunday school on my own when I was young. Even though my mother wasn't Christian or anything, I would think maybe that might help. Maybe I won't see them then. It didn't stop them. They were still there. It wasn't like they were everywhere, but I'd bump into them, bump into significant things, and I didn't want it anymore. I was a bit disturbed, and I wondered whether at one point, not then, but later on, I did think, oh my God, am I mentally ill? Have I got a mental illness? Is that why I'm seeing these things and nobody else is? Because I'm very aware other people weren't seeing them. So I went on this journey to find out more spiritually, and it wasn't an intentional journey, but it was just searching for answers. My father would say, 'Look, we're just psychic,' because he seemed to have this, but he didn't talk about it either. So there was this unsaid, well, it's just the way we are.

0:33:25.2 So whether he saw things like that, I really don't know, but he knew things. He used to know things. So if anything happened, he would know. He would know what happened or how. So he'd have this unsaid knowledge. So I think in our family obviously - and then my nan doing the tea leaves - there was obviously something there that again had never been discussed or opened. I just had to get on with it. So I went on, yes, as I say, this kind of journey. So I did a bit of the witch thing when I was living in Oxford. That's jumping ahead a bit. So I moved out of home because I found it very unpleasant being at home. My mum's boyfriend would make sexual advances towards me. My mum was then having children with him, so I moved. I moved out and got my own bedsit and a job out there, and so I think I was 17 when I did that. So I wasn't very old. That became fun, but saying fun, it was still party-ish, and now I don't consider that particularly fun.

0:35:09.3 I'm not even sure where I made... I had a lot of friends, I think, from college. I went to college for a few months in Hemel. Maybe even a year, year and a bit, but I dropped out in the end because I was smoking, I wasn't... And also, every time I did English, I kept failing it, which became a real frustration. I was doing art, English, woodwork, mechanics. I was doing all the things I wasn't allowed to do, really. I was the only girl that was doing these things. My art teacher pinned me in the photography rooms one day and tried to kiss me, and so I just dropped out. In those days, again, you couldn't really report a teacher for something like that. So, on top of the smoking and not being very

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together. I was a social secretary though, and I was putting on bands. I put on Marillion, a gig for Marillion and things, and I knew them personally. I was a very successful social secretary. I earned the college, I think, about £2,000 that year, which was unheard of, especially in the '70s. I was very good at doing that.

0:36:45.9 I remember the principal got me up and said, 'Look, I'd love to keep you, but you need to start succeeding at your lessons, not just at running the social secretary thing.' So, I decided I'd go, I'd leave, and that's when I went to St Albans, sorry. Yes, so then I went to St Albans. With that, there were certain friends that came over with me. In that period, I met a boyfriend who wasn't a particularly great person. My judgement wasn't particularly great at that point. I think my own self-esteem was very low at that point, after the assault and my mum and everything. So, I got together with this guy who was he was actually a bit of a drug dealer, I think, and they were into motorbikes, into classic British bikes. We lived in squats, and we moved around St Albans in different squats and different places. In the end, I ended up getting in trouble with drugs, or I started to feel like I was. Somebody took me aside and said... I was given heroin as an 18th birthday present, not knowing what it was, because it was called smack, and I didn't know what smack was. I just assumed it was another okay-ish drug.

0:38:30.6 People around me were getting ill, and I didn't understand why, because I was smoking it, and I presume they were injecting, but I never saw them do that. I just didn't understand why they kept getting ill. I remember this chap was a lot older than us. His name was Big Pete. He took me into the toilets one day into the flat I had, and he made me hold his belt, and he injected, and I actually threw up. I was horrified. He said, 'You're doing heroin, Rachael, do you not realise you're doing heroin? And you're too nice for this. You need to get away from this.' I was absolutely, what? Me doing heroin? I just couldn't believe it. I was like, my God. It sounds really stupid and naïve, but I was. I was really naïve. So, I decided at that point, I would get out of it, but it didn't happen immediately. It took a few months. I ended up moving to Cumbria. A friend of mine offered for me to go up there, and I moved into a commune. Completely the opposite end of the country, 180.

0:39:59.1 I moved up there with this guy who wasn't great. At that point, I think he'd hit me a couple of times, but I didn't realise how controlling he was. The rest of the group I was with, again, a really contrasted thing, they were amazing. It was almost like a family set-up. There was some older people, some kids, some people from Canada. There were people that were starting to do toffee businesses that had never been done in the UK. We had our own generator. I was hanging out with a lot called the 'Tibetans' that were a branch of New Age travellers, but that were much more spiritual and totally into eco. So, we were quite often on the road, at festivals and things like that, but then we

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would go back there as a base, but it had its own festival site. So, the house I lived in had a festival site called The Blue Moon. It had a different colour moon each year, but it was called Prior House, and it was this big festival site. So, once a year, all these people would descend upon us and there would be a festival, which was again, really odd.

0:41:22.4 I lived in what was a Satsang room, and a Satsang room is like a meditation room. It was a massive 40, 50-foot room that was all pine. The whole ceiling, everything was pine. Basically, it was my room, but if there were any children staying, they would stay there as well. That's when I started... I had some friends that were into being a premie, which was an Indian guru. So, I went with them to get what they called knowledge, which was meditation techniques, and started practising those on a daily basis. Obviously, left the drugs behind, which was a good thing, but did find that I was still with this boyfriend. He was quite full-on, really. He was very charismatic and almost very cult leader-ish. He had quite an influence socially, locally. I was still exploring. I had things like runes. I'd explore my own. I had tarot cards from a young age, and things like that were just given to me, and again, I never thought anything of them. From about 14, 15, I had a set of tarot cards.

0:43:19.7 Also, going back a bit, I also had poltergeists. I knew they were to do with me, and we called them - everybody did - called them the twins. They never did anything horrible. They just moved things and played little silly tricks, and occasionally opened doors, and did things that just made... Some people were a bit frightened of them, but I never found them frightening because I just thought... I actually thought they were me and my brother in a weird way. I just assumed that's what they were. Anyway, so I was still exploring that side of myself. Trying to figure out what was going on. I looked more into Buddhism, looking at different... Harry Krishna, all sorts of religious - I don't know whether you call them doctrine, but beliefs, religious beliefs, but I carried on meditating. I was probably 18 and I was meditating on a daily basis. The world around me was still quite chaotic, though. It still seemed pretty chaotic. Very, very bizarre. It was a different culture up there completely again. There was about 3000 people living in 30 miles.

0:45:09.5 So, it was a very small community, quite isolated communities, and everybody knew what everybody did. There were still people coming up through the mines black at the end of the day, driving through the town, because they didn't have showers at the mines. They'd literally be covered in black, and they'd still be crawling on their knees and things like that, mining. It was, again, a very mixed culture. There were the hippies on the moor, because we were on a moor, and there were the miners and the farmers, and I fell into the hippies, but again, people always treated me as though I was separate to it all. I remember one day the police came and busted the farm and they found dope. I think that was it. They gathered it all up, busted everywhere, and then took everybody down to the

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local police station. There was one police station with one cell. They put my boyfriend in the cell because he was, obviously, the dodgy person, and they left me in the reception and the policeman said to me, 'We know you've got nothing to do with any of this,' and they interviewed every other person around me.

0:46:45.1 It was really bizarre. So, I don't know whether I had a certain, I don't know, presence or I don't know what was going on, or whether I just was that naïve that people just thought, well, she's got nothing to do with this. It was just really bizarre. The courtroom, a cell, and police all in one little thing. At one point, the people I know... It was almost like some comedy sketch. Somebody hid the evidence, so they didn't even have the evidence to prosecute people in the end, because the police left it somewhere and somebody hid it. So, it was all really... It always seemed, I don't know, everything's larger than life and a bit bizarre, and I don't know whether it was just the time that we were living in. It was a bit crazy. So, I just carried on that way, but I wasn't happy, and this boyfriend was quite coercive. Well, very coercive and controlling. I probably in some ways was mimicking my childhood parents' relationship. It just wasn't great.

0:48:15.8 We moved from Prior House, and we'd been around a couple, but he was still quite a drug abuser, really, and drinker, which I wasn't really particularly by that time. I was just meditating constantly. Probably that was my drug of choice. One day, his father came up from down south to visit us out of the blue, which was really odd because it was the middle of nowhere. I mean, we're on a moor. He drank loads of a thing called Metaxa brandy. There's really quite a strong brandy called Metaxa. Anyway, after not drinking for a while, he drank loads of Metaxa. We got back to Prior House, and it was really weird, the commune. There were some locals. Greg, who ran it, knew all the locals. He was a dry stone waller. He knew all the locals. There was a couple of local guys there and they were drinking, and they were having a wake before the guy had died, which I'd never heard of. So, the guy who was dying was there. He was due to die in a couple of weeks, so they were having this drinking wake for him, including him. It was all a bit strange.

0:49:48.0 So, we got back, and I went upstairs, obviously, because I was just like, 'This is a bit odd. I'm going to go to bed.' I went to bed and Gary, my boyfriend, he stayed downstairs drinking with them. The next minute, he came crawling up, literally crawling up the stairs, and crawled into the room, and he got into the bed, and he just dropped dead. He gave his breath, his last breath, and dropped dead. The room had children in at the time. I think it had about three children in, including one of them being his daughter, who had come to stay. I went nuts. I started hitting him. I didn't know anything about mouth-to-mouth. So, I started hitting him and actually going, 'You bastard, you can't die on me!' And shouting. I went running downstairs because nothing was happening, I went running

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downstairs to Greg, started saying, 'Greg, Greg, Gary's dead,' and he said, 'No, no, no, he's just drunk. He's passed out.' I physically was dragging him saying, 'No, he's dead, he's dead.'

0:51:00.1 So, I dragged him upstairs and he looked at him and he just went, 'Oh my God, you're right,' and he started giving him mouth to mouth. He said to me, 'Go and call an ambulance.' Well, we were 30 miles away from any... Up a hill, up a mountain, but he said, 'Go and call an ambulance.' So, I did, and then he shouts down through the ceiling, 'He's alive! He's alive!' So, I put down the phone, I went running up there, and then just as I was getting up the stairs, he went, 'No, he's dead again.' Honestly, it was ridiculous. So, I went back on the phone, and then he went, 'No, he's alive, he's alive!' So, I went back up and he was, he'd got him back. He'd got him back alive, but he'd gone for well over five minutes. He really had. Greg taught me what to do, and I just watched him, and the children were so calm through it all. It was so bizarre. It was not what you really want children to be watching or seeing, but they were just so calm. It was amazing.

0:52:12.2 Yes, he died once in the night, but I got him back again, but then after that, he was ill for about a week. He wouldn't see a doctor, but he just got better and better. But that gave me a fear of people drinking, excessively drinking, that would last a lifetime, I think. I don't like people that drink too much. It does unnerve me a bit now still. We lived with some amazing people. There was one guy whose father, he was related to royalty in Sri Lanka. There was a lot of ex-public school kids that left that life, but were really quite smart, and so they had wind turbines on their vans and things. They were really in another league environmentally, but hated. We were so hated by the government at that point, and then the Beanfield happened, which I knew people in, the battle of the Beanfield, where the police just came and raided at five, six in the morning. They were just families generally. Yes, people smoked. They were families just living a different lifestyle. They smashed everything of theirs up.

0:53:55.1 It was quite a frightening time in history, because for being different, you were really persecuted, and for having environmental beliefs, you were persecuted. Most of us were vegetarian. That wasn't a normal thing. You were literally insane if you were vegetarian then. So, things that we see as very normal now, not even normal, maybe fashionable, in those days, you were very much seen as subversive. There became almost a war socially between the government and the small minority that were subversive, who were actually very peaceful. I don't think I ever saw any aggression towards police, really, myself. Only politeness, but I saw a lot of aggression from police at that point. The police and the Metropolitan, especially at that point, were very aggressive. I remember we went to a party in Covent Garden, and we were sitting playing a guitar. We'd just been to the party.

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We'd finished the party. We weren't even drunk or anything. We were just sitting with a guitar, an acoustic guitar, singing in a square, not loudly.

0:55:34.5 The next minute, I think there was about four or five riot vans pulled up, and my friend, John, who was playing the guitar, they grabbed him and threw him in the back of the van, started beating him up, and I'd never seen anything like that. I said, 'Excuse me, what are you arresting him for?' I was very, you follow the lines, you follow the rules, and everything will be okay. So, even though I'd done the drugs, I was very rule-following in my life in general. The guy just grabbed me and said, 'If you don't, you will be in there with him. It's your choice.' So, I just shut up and backed off. I remember being so frightened, and they grabbed a couple of my friends, and that was it. They just shoved them in the van, start beating them up, and then in the morning, they put behind the judge and were done for... I can't remember, what were they done for? Something like assaulting a police officer and something the peace, you know.

0:56:56.2 Abi: Yes, disrupting the peace?

0:56:57.7 Rachael: Something like that. We were literally sitting as quietly as we are now, but with an acoustic guitar playing. We weren't doing anything subversive, but there was an awful lot of tension at that point. Then there were things like, I would go to Stonehenge, which was a festival, a free festival run by the bikers, and the bikers were actually really strict about what drugs they let on. They wouldn't have any, what they would call hard drugs in those days. Anybody who did anything like heroin or coke and that would be thrown off-site and beaten up. So, there was a form of policing there going on with what they allowed and what they didn't allow, and again, the police came and stopped that one year. That was another social history thing. At the same time, we were fighting to keep the stones, to be able to go and see the stones, because they'd suddenly started saying that the stones were out of bounds, that Stonehenge couldn't be gone to. My brother was huge on the movement of that as well.

0:58:27.9 I'd join in a bit, but he was one of the orchestrators of that, because by that time, he was living around Glastonbury. So, there did seem this massive political strategy going on, and it was when Margaret Thatcher was in charge. So, there was Greenham Common. All these things were happening. CND were very much big protests that I went on, and there were anti-Nazi, when I was slightly younger, there was the Anti-Nazi League things. So, I was, kind of, I suppose, an activist in some ways but not a violent one at all, but I went to a lot of political rallies. I went to a lot of political rallies, and in those days, the Nazi League, as they were called, were horrendous. The fights and things were absolutely awful. The police, again, at that point, it was potluck. If you were there, you

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might get hit or you might get taken in. So, I think from quite a young age, I had very much a desire for justice and for equality, and again, it wasn't socially the norm in those days. It was something that was seen as subversive and activist. It wasn't a human right almost.

1:00:24.7 My brother, I think, was quite hurt. He was physically hurt in an anti-Nazi rally once, but we kept doing things like that. Anti-fox hunting anti-Nazi. I suppose it was seen... I don't know whether it is now, but it was seen as a right to be able to protest and do it peacefully. Whereas now I don't even know if that's a right anymore, really. It's questionable. Whereas those days, you could make a lot of noise and you could put a lot of banners out, and you could chant, and you could do whatever and you could show... I was on a rally where there was, they used to say 30,000, and there wasn't. There was almost millions of people. So, there was anti-Thatcher rallies. There was anti-Nazi rallies and people would come in from everywhere to protest against what was happening. Whether it did any good, I don't know. It was beliefs, people's beliefs, and it was funny because I will get to that point, but later, somehow, I was passing Anne, who I ended up living with a lot.

1:01:56.9 She was talking on these rallies. She was one of the people that would actually give speeches there, and I was at them, at Greenham Common and things like that. So, yes, we were somehow having a parallel life, weirdly, but from two very different positions.

1:02:23.4 Abi: So, a lot of this, your childhood experiences, from the difficulties to how you became this activist and exploring the psychic esoteric perhaps elements, and that gradually led you down the path of your spiritualism, because I believe you said as well that in Ilfracombe, you...

1:02:57.9 Rachael: Well, the first time I turned up here, I put my finger on a map to get away from my own relationship and my husband, really, because that, I didn't feel was a very positive relationship. I felt quite trapped in that. I'd been feeling for quite a while I needed to get away. I wanted just a break to begin with, just to go and reflect, and so I shut my eyes, put my finger on a map, and it ended up on Ilfracombe, which I'd never been to before, even though I was living in Bristol. So, I literally booked the next day, I did the same thing, because in those days you had Yellow Pages! So, I did the same thing with Yellow Pages with bed and breakfasts, and came up with, I think it was called Woodside or something. It's now called Devonshire, but it's on the same road. It's down on Tors Park. I phoned them up and said, 'Hi, have you got any rooms for tomorrow?' And they were like, 'Yes, we have.' So, I said, 'Okay, I'll come and see you tomorrow.' And they were like, 'How long do you want?' I said, 'Two nights. Two nights is fine.'

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1:04:23.9 So, I booked to come down and I just got in the car came down, and the guy was lovely. I can't remember his name, but he was great. It was a Sunday, so I said, 'Is there anywhere I can eat? Is there an Indian or anything around?' He said, 'Yes, there's one not far away.' So, he gave me directions for what is the spice, Asian spice, spice, something... At the bottom at Greenside Close, is it? Green...

1:04:58.1 Abi: I think so.

1:04:59.0 Rachael: Opposite Lidl.

1:04:59.6 Abi: Opposite Lidl?

1:05:00.5 Rachael: Yes.

1:05:00.9 Abi: Yes, I think...

1:05:02.5 Rachael: Green something close...

1:05:04.6 Abi: Yes. It's changed names a couple of times, I think.

1:05:06.1 Rachael: Has it? But yes, the spice something...

1:05:09.1 Abi: Yes, Tandoori Spice, I think.

1:05:10.2 Rachael: That's right. So, I made my way to go down there, only from the Tors, somehow missed the Indian, walked straight up to the top of the road, and on the left-hand side, there was a lady standing outside and this very esoteric music going on. I thought, oh, that's funny, that sounds very meditation. She said, 'Hello.' I said, 'Hi, I don't suppose to know where the Indian is?' She said, 'Yes, it's back that way. You've walked straight past it. Would you like to join us?' I said, 'With what?' She said, 'We're just about to have a circle,' and I was like 'A circle?' And she said, 'Yes, we're just about to have a circle.' I said, 'Oh.' She said, 'We don't have a medium at the moment.' I said, 'Well, that's weird because I'm a medium.' So, by that time, I'd trained in Stansted Hall and things, and she said, 'Come and join us, come and join us. You don't need to be a medium. Just come and join us.'

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So, that's what I did. I didn't have my Indian. I had it later and did that. I thought, this is really... As I was coming out, I was thinking, this is really weird, I feel like I've come home oddly.

1:06:36.3 It feels really, really strange. So, I had my Indian, didn't think anything of it, and then the next day thought, I'll just look in the estate agent windows. I just started looking at houses, and within 12 weeks, I'd bought this house. Everything just went like that, literally. It was almost like somebody was saying to me, you're home, you're here, and it's fine. It just all happened so easily and so quickly that I didn't even know I was trying to move. Do you know what I mean? It just happened. Before I knew it, yes, I'd left my husband and moved here with my son! But it was what I needed. It really was what I needed, and I think it was what he needed as well. I was starting to get worried about Bristol, the amount of knife crime. I was doing a lot of outreach work, and so I was going, culturally, all over the city with different groups, working with LGBTQ, different West African groups, different groups.

1:08:04.2 I loved doing that, but there seemed to be a shift in Bristol, and it was becoming more and more violent, and there were more and more people being stabbed for no reason. I thought, it'd be quite good if Miles isn't in this, really. Get him out of this. Not knowing that really that that was quite a shift for a young man of 13 or whatever, 12 or 13, to go from a Bristol environment. But he'd had quite a cultural upbringing that was quite different because my husband was an acrobat. I met him under a trapeze at Glastonbury.

1:08:52.7 Abi: As you do.

1:08:53.7 Rachael: As you do.

1:08:54.5 Abi: Yes.

1:08:55.1 Rachael: Yes! So, I used to climb, because I became an animator in London, and I used to climb with his acrobatic partner. We used to climb at Mile End. So, in between my work, I was an avid climber. I'd learned to climb in North Wales, living up there where I bought my first home. So, yes, I've jumped about. I was homeless, then bought a home. So, to keep myself sane in London, I went climbing every day near enough, if I could, in Mile End. I met Pete there, just messing about, climbing. Then, no arrangement, never thought I'd see him again, and then suddenly I fell in love with this trapeze, and I'd never even seen the circus. As a child, we just didn't do things like that, really. I

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don't know whether it was my dad keeping us away from things or... I don't know, but we didn't, because the circus used to come once a year to Hemel, as far as I know, and I never saw it.

1:10:11.6 I remember seeing this film called *Trapeze* with Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis, and it's about somebody who did this. It's a love story, but it's also about doing a triple trapeze thing, I don't know what you'd call it. I just always fell in love with that, that film just, I don't know, had such significance for me and I don't know why. Then I fell in love with this flying trapeze rig in Glastonbury, and I just remember staring and staring at it. So, I was taking a bit of time off from animation, helping some friends out doing behind acoustic stage food because they were a TV company, they used to do all the TV food. They said, just come and give us a hand. So, I was staring at this trapeze and the guy who ran the trapeze because Glastonbury wasn't open yet, we were there beforehand, said 'Would you like a go? You look like you're fit enough to to do it,' and I was like, my God, yes, I'd love a go.

1:11:29.1 So, the minute I got on that, I fell in love. I got down off it and literally fell in love. It was really weird. So, I then saw Pete, and next to Pete was Paul, and we just started talking and I didn't think much of it really, I just thought, he's nice, he's a nice guy. Then we just kept talking day after day, and I had to leave early because I injured my knee, probably from doing the trapeze and not being trained yet and running around all day on it, so I've got a bit of housemaids knee or something. So, I disappeared, and we said we'd swap numbers, and I never did. Months later, I bumped into the catering crew, the guy who ran it, and he said, 'Some guy came up and tried to get your number and we wouldn't give it to him, but I've got his for you.' So, Paul had left his number. Then when I tried to get in touch, he was touring France. So, there seemed to be this thing where we kept missing, and then we met. I was then working, doing exhibition work because I'd left the animation because I was just fed up with sitting at a desk, to be honest, I didn't get on very well at sitting down all day.

1:12:56.4 Then did big exhibition work for things like Oxford Street Top Shop and Harrods, so we did loads of that. So, I was doing a lot of airbrushing and climbing on scaffold, airbrushing and things. It's great. Doing things like Regent Street lights. Anyway, he came over and I met him then and it was a bit odd, but we decided we'd meet up and I thought it might be good to work in Bristol, there might be more work. So, I thought I'd go and do a bit more animation, some other stuff in Bristol. His father was letting out a flat, lived in West Mall, and he was letting out the balcony room flat. So, me and a girlfriend went and hired that, but that was in Paul's family home, but Paul wasn't there most of the time. I liked him, and I think he liked me, but it was just one of those things, we just

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weren't sure what was going on. It was weird, I used to talk to his mother, who was dead, but in those days, I wasn't very aware that I used to do these things, I just naturally did them.

1:14:09.9 So, occasionally, somebody would go, 'Who are you talking to?' I'd go, 'Nobody,' but I didn't even know I was doing it out loud quite often, but she said to me, 'Go and ask him out,' and I was like, no, no, I think I've made it clear I like him. She was like, no, go and ask him out, and she actually opened the door, and I was like, all right, I'll go and ask him out. So, I got to the bottom of the stairs, and we made each other jump because it was dark and he was coming up the stairs and I was - so I said, 'I don't suppose you want a coffee or something,' and he was like, 'No, I've got to get up really early for work in the morning. I've got to be up at six but thank you.' Anyway, I then went and made myself a drink and it was on a different level to the room, and it was really weird, I got back in my room, and he was there on my - I got right up, because I only had candles, and he was there on my bed. That was the beginning of our relationship. I always blame - well, not blame his mother, but it was her that harassed me into it, so his dead mother. It was weird. It was kind of meant to be in an odd way.

1:15:35.5 Abi: Have you found that it's become easier over time with your identity as someone - is it easier now to navigate that experience?

1:15:54.4 Rachael: No.

1:15:55.2 Abi: Is that an external or an internal thing?

1:16:01.4 Rachael: I think it's both. I know some people really don't like it, and I know there's still a lot of stigma with it. I also don't like associating with a lot of people that do do it, not that they're charlatans, but I think it can be manipulated for the wrong reasons almost. I think people can become quite addicted to readings. I'm not saying I wouldn't do a reading these days. I'm probably becoming more comfortable again because professionally, I have done readings over the years and worked in it as a profession, but I got very much put off from that. I found a lot of people in the business would tell people, almost fortune tell, which I really disagree with that form of reading. I think it takes away free will. It's like going to a counsellor and going every week and deciding you're not doing anything unless they tell you what to do. I think a lot of people, even though that might be what they're looking for from a reading is guidance, I don't think you've got the right to tell anybody what their future and what they will do.

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1:17:27.4 Abi: So, even if the reader is being truthful, what it is they're saying, it's still...

1:17:33.6 Rachael: I think once you influence someone, it's like if I said to you, right, you're going to meet someone and they'll have blonde hair and blue eyes and wear red shoes, you will only look for people that have blonde hair, blue eyes and red shoes. It's just natural that we do that. So, I really think it's wrong to do that. To say to them, you have potential of meeting someone who's lovely, that's a very different thing, I think, to giving - whether you see a specific or, I don't know, there's a huge responsibility in making sure people still have their free will in life, and also, I think it should be about healing and not about prediction almost. So, when I've done readings where loved ones have come through, I think it's more to do with that person who's passed and the person who's obviously grieving making some kind of peace. It's not about, come and see me every three weeks and we'll have a get together, not saying that you can't once a year contact that person, because I think that's kind of quite nice, but I think it's about tying up loose ends almost and allowing healing.

1:19:05.4 Because usually when somebody is traumatised by grief, it's because somebody died very quickly or traumatically and they haven't had time to say goodbye, and I think part of that grief is held from the other side almost. So, that person didn't have chance to say goodbye either. So, there's two energetic things that haven't resolved almost. So, I think your job as a medium is to stay in the middle, is to be that unsaid sandwich that allows those two things to join and feel each other. Once they do that, I think that kind of settles. So, I've always seen it more as a healing than a prediction almost. I'm not saying you don't see things, but I just think there is a huge responsibility, and also there's laws that are in charge of it now, it's under the Consumer Goods Act.

1:20:18.4 Abi: Is it?

1:20:19.3 Rachael: Yes, whether we're now not part of Europe, so whether that doesn't matter, I don't know, but for some years, because we were part of Europe, it meant that if I said to you, you're going to buy a red pair of shoes next week, and you didn't, you could come back and go, right, you told me you were going to buy a red pair - not many people realise that because they haven't trained professionally in it. So, there's a lot of people that are, it's like builders, there's a lot of builders out there, but these days most people have certificates and have trained, whereas in mediumship and psychic it's very much almost a huge untrained, there's a lot of bad practice going on and taught bad practice. So, somebody with bad practice will teach somebody else with bad practice and they don't

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realise there are places to train and actually learn good practice. So, I think what I originally did was by the time I got to my 30s and it was still happening all the time, kept having people walk up to me, and my husband would go, 'Is that another one of those people,' people would walk up and go, 'You know you're a medium,' just off the street. I'd be like, can you leave me alone please?

1:21:39.7 So, I was very in denial in a way, but it was still happening an awful lot to me, and I didn't know how to control it. I used to look at it a bit like frisking, like a policeman frisking you without permission, and I would be the policeman, so I wouldn't deliberately be doing it, I wouldn't even know that I was doing it, but without knowing it, I'd be rifling through people's pockets. I've seen this style of stuff on TV where it's looked at as amazing. I don't think that's amazing. Nobody's got the right to go rifling through your pockets, nobody, without permission, without somebody going, 'Could you look in my pockets please?' So, I do feel there's a huge discrepancy with the way people behave with it, and it's seen as a power thing as well. So, yes, when I did train with it, I learnt not to do it and to do it in a more disciplined way. That, for me, was a relief. It was a huge relief. It was a massive turning point for me because I used to see it as a curse almost.

1:23:01.7 I used to beg for it not to be there, because it wasn't something I knew how to not do or stop, and I just knew too much sometimes about too many things, and it would get me in trouble sometimes. So, yes, for example, I went to dinner with one of my bosses in animation, and I walked through her front door and said, 'You've left the gas on,' and she just looked at me and said, 'I'll tell you later.' Later, she said, 'We don't have gas because the last person killed themselves with the gas,' but all I could smell was the gas. So, I instantly would say these things that would then make people go, what's going on? Or has she looked at my life? Yes, it's not a nice thing really. It's not. So, I felt really thankful when I learnt to put it, not in its box, but give it a boundary, and then choose whether I do it or not, or when, or with who, and what agreement. So, when I got to the spiritualist church, I'd already then been trained to a certain degree, and they asked if I would then help out.

1:24:34.6 The history of the church, it had been given by a lady to the community of Ilfracombe as a spiritualist church, and she had left it under the guise of the Christian - because there's two main camps in spiritualism as far as churches, there's the Christian Spiritualist and there's SNU, which is the Spiritualist National Union. It was under the Christian Spiritualist, and they held the keys or looked after it as such. So, there was about three people running it that were all quite elderly but were lovely. David was one of them. I'm so bad with names. There was a lady and her husband, and I can't remember their names, but I can see their faces. The lady who introduced me in, who asked me in, and also there was another lady up the road that did an awful lot to help out as well, who is still alive, Erica's mother, and I've gone name blank on her name as well. Erica still did a lot for

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- she was president of the rotary and things like that. Her mother did a lot for years. They were doing, each Saturday, usually I think Fridays, Saturdays and Sunday, they'd do a couple. *[Rachael later recalled the names Pixie (and her Husband), Joan and David.] [The interviewee would like to reiterate that there are also many good mediums in the Ilfracombe area.]*

1:26:13.9 I don't know if you've ever been to one, but it kind of works a little bit like a normal church in some ways, sounds a bit bizarre, but you have services, so you sing hymns, but as in very uplifting. So, probably a bit more like a black church in a way, very uplifting songs, all about light and happiness, so not your typical hymns, you could sing Robbie Williams' *Angels*, so they'd all be quite uplifting songs. They'd do different services, so they'd do a service that would be a platform that people would just come to, to get communication. So, you'd have like an altar, a normal altar. You'd have the church. People would come and they'd pay a donation of a couple of pounds or a pound or something, and then they would wait for a medium, and we'd have different mediums we'd book from all over the country that would come here, including myself, that would then stand on platform and link with somebody from spirit, and then that would link to somebody in the audience, and they would give a reading, but a public one.

1:27:51.7 So, it wouldn't be a predictive reading, it would be, I've got your grandmother here, she was five foot ten, she had brown eyes, she looked like this, and she's come to tell me whatever. People would come for these readings, and some people would be desperate to talk to a loved one, they really would. They would have waited years. Some people have waited ten years or more to talk to their loved one, and maybe it wouldn't happen, or it would. Then on Sunday, you would do a more what they called divine service, and that would be where somebody would give philosophy. So, you'd start with maybe a book reading that would go into inspirational philosophy. So, it would be unwritten, you would just channel it really. Then, again, you'd do the hymns and the service, but you wouldn't do the platform as such. It would be more a traditional divine service. It's quite interesting really.

1:29:17.0 Abi: Did you find that people who came along to those services, were they often people from directly in town, or would people come from a bit further afield, did you know, because I think a lot of people perhaps aren't aware that...

1:29:34.5 Rachael: There was a lot of local people. I think we advertised outside on the - but I don't know whether it was advertised in any other way, I'm not sure. There's still one goes on in Biddeford and in Barnstable. The Barnstable one I don't think has such a good reputation as Biddeford. They're run by the SNU, I think, and not the Christian. So, what happened in the end, I mean, it ran for years

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and years. I'm not 100 per cent sure, you might have to look up the history, but I think it was probably going for 30 or 40 years or something, I don't know, quite a long time. Because spiritualism became extremely popular after the Second World War, because so many people lost loved ones in the war, young, obviously, but they were desperate to communicate. There was also a lot of scepticism, a lot of the old cabinet trance work that went on with ectoplasm and all that whole dramatic knock on the table and all of that kind of - it was a huge industry, I would say, really at one point in England, and also you could still be jailed for being a witch in this country till 1953, I think it was.

1:31:18.4 So, there was still a huge amount of controversy and dislike and scepticism, which is healthier, I agree with scepticism, I think it's a very healthy thing to have. I think until something's proved to you yourself as an individual, there's no reason you should believe in it, anything, whatever it is. I think you have to have your own truth in it before you believe anything. I think that's what a lot of my journey was, trying to prove what was going on and trying to discern what it was, whether these scary things were ghosts that were going to hurt me, and it took me years to understand all these things on a more emotional intelligence level, because people still try and scare people with ghosts. There's nothing they can do. They're not there. They're not spirits. They're the record playing, the band isn't there, the band's gone. It doesn't mean to say you can't get loads of information from the band, you can hear the words, you can still get a feel of them.

1:32:35.2 I think people get that confused, and I think it takes quite a lot of studying and knowledge within that to realise that, to see the different levels or layers, and realise that when someone does come through, they come in pure love and that's all you feel. You don't feel scared. There's no fear. There's not anybody horrible that's going to come in. Somebody can't force themselves upon you, if you don't want to hear from them, you don't want to hear from them. I think people can get confused. So, I'd get people phone me up sometimes and say, 'I'm scared, things are moving around my house.' Straight away I'd say, 'Has your granddad passed recently?' They'd go, 'Yes, not long ago.' I would go, 'And is your small child seeing this, seeing something?' 'They're seeing something, yes, but I was really scared and the more frightened I got, the more worried I got about it.' I'd go, 'Maybe if you just say hi, granddad, that might stop,' because quite often what happens, the more anxious you get, the more anxious the spirit get, tries to calm you, probably becomes a bit more present. They're not all expert in communication, and so it can come off a little bit jagged sometimes, let's put it that way.

1:34:10.2 So, some people, when they're trying to go, it's okay, can makes things seem a little bit off. It's just them trying to reach out and say, you're all right really, it's okay. Personally, I don't think there's a heaven and hell. I think we live in heaven and hell here, myself, in our state of minds really. I

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think that's more of what determines our heaven and hell. I do think that time isn't linear and I'm not sure what plane you would say they're on, I know I communicate them, I know that my energetic - I know from where and how I do it now, I know I have to speed my energy up and I have to push it upwards, and that's how I communicate with people who have passed. If I want to communicate with somebody who's alive, I push my energy out, and it goes from my centre, whereas the other one goes from the top of my head. So, I know the sort of technical ways I do things now and how they're done. I can see that when other people are doing things, deliberate or non-deliberate, but I think for many years I've wanted to use what I have for healing, I suppose, that's important to me.

1:35:53.0 Abi: Yes, that's that being a fixer.

1:35:55.0 Rachael: Yes, it is. It's the old fixer thing.

1:35:59.9 Abi: It sort of leaps around.

1:36:04.8 Rachael: Yes, because I became a drugs and alcohol counsellor as well, and so it became that whole, yes, let's fix it, which came out in a very young age in me really. I've realised you can't fix everything. People fix when they want to be fixed actually, but you can still put a hand there and support and you can still give information or...

1:36:29.4 Abi: Providing help and provide the tools.

1:36:31.7 Rachael: Yes, exactly. Help them find themselves, yes. So, yes, I've learned a lot in those lessons, definitely, and I've still got many more to learn, I'm sure. I'm not perfect by any means. I still can be a mess or worry or everything we all do. I'm still meditating. So, 45 years later or whatever, nearly, but I still do that most days, and I still enjoy doing that. I think I wouldn't be alive if I hadn't have done it. I think that's what kept my sanity and my grounding, because life isn't easy for people generally. It's not a dream for anyone, is it really? We all have our trials and tribulations and if we don't, our family is. We all go through journeys, but I think that's what makes us in a way as well. That's a very brief cut through, I think, there's a lot more than that, but I was really sad when the church - what happened in the end in the church was that I was ill, I didn't know I'd got this condition, the CDS and the other things, and I was collapsing and becoming quite ill, and so I felt like I need to step back. There wasn't really anybody else who could do it on a regular basis, because the other

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people were quite elderly and they were struggling as well, and it felt like the community didn't know how to hold it together.

1:38:31.8 Maybe not enough people in the community knew about it, I don't know, and there was this clause that if it fell under disrepute, the building itself, they could sell it even though it was not theirs, it was the Ilfracombe's peoples because they managed it. So, they literally allowed it to fall into this sort of disrepute and then sold it off, which was awful because it wasn't theirs, it was the people's. It had be given to the people of Ilfracombe. I don't even know, if it had been sold, then surely the money should have gone back to be something for the community for that to be accessed, because there was such a belief in, as I say, the 20s and 30s, the 40s, that that was a needed, almost like having a doctor, I suppose, that that was a needed service. As I say, there's a lot of controversy with whether it works, whether it's real, whether it's not, whether it's, all of that, and I know a lot of people that do work all over the world with it in various different roles. Some do big shows, some just do one-to-one, some to healing, lots of people do different roles within it.

1:40:12.1 Then I've always struggled with the financial side of it, I think, but then people say, well, if you don't earn money from it and you're doing it as a full-time job, how are you meant to support yourself? Which I do get, but it's a very hard thing because something that's a gift or people see as a gift, how do you put a price on that or a value on it? It's quite difficult. It's not something I've always been comfortable with, even though I have charged.

1:40:50.3 Abi: Well, it's one of those things of having to get by and figure out how to get by.

1:41:02.5 Rachael: Yes, I think that's a bit of a burden of creative people in any way that they struggle with that.

1:41:09.2 Abi: There's artists that say there's a difference between art that sells and art that I love making, or art that I think is good.

1:41:17.3 Rachael: Exactly.

1:41:18.2 Abi: Sometimes they coincide, but sometimes...

1:41:20.3 Rachael: No, they don't always, do they, not at all. I did it as a job for a while, and then I thought, I'm not sure whether I want to earn my money from doing this. Now, I see it more as a

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service and I would probably be open to it again after years of not being actually, because I see that there is a need, but I definitely wouldn't want to influence people's lives to the point that they have no free will. I think that's really important for me. I think it's about empowerment.

1:41:58.9 Abi: Yes. What is it that you would most like to be known for yourself?

1:42:41.1 Rachael: Interesting. I think the older you get, you do want to leave something behind, I'm not quite sure what it is. I would like to leave something that makes people feel good. Something that reassures people that there are skills maybe that can help people live their lives. I did a reading not long ago for somebody I know, and she said, 'I've never had a reading like that.' She said, 'it felt like you were just giving me tools to help me.' I thought, that's fine by me. It's not about telling you what's next, it's about giving you some tools to cope with what's next actually. For me, that's fine. That's great. So, advice and guidance maybe, it's not about telling someone anything, but we all need guidance and support. I think if I've got any knowledge that can help with that, then that would be great. I've started writing books more on things like that, and I think I do that because I want to pass on some form of, I got through a really difficult time, because my life hasn't always been easy.

1:44:12.7 There's a few times I've felt really against it and, not the world's against me, I don't believe that, but I've been in situations, I've been in abusive situations, I've been raped, I've had different sexual assaults, and I think things like that are tough to get through. There's no age limit to them. I think that's the other thing. You kind of feel once you're grown up that these things aren't going to happen, but they do. They can still come in and take you unawares, and I think it's just having the tools and the knowledge to try and cope with those really.

1:45:06.1 Abi: Thank you ever so much.

1:45:11.3 Rachael: That's all right. It's more weird, there's some odd thing, I did try a coven once, that was really weird, dancing naked and all of that, in Oxford. Not my bag really, no, it wasn't my thing at all. Kind of fun at the time, but, no, it was very serious and very ritualistic. A lot of these things are very ritualistic, I think, and I think my rituals go back to nature, almost shamanism. So, I've looked into things like that as well. So, mine are just naturally what I've learnt from the wind and the air and the birds.

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1:46:03.5 Abi: Almost looking back again to the things you picked up from your childhood, whether they were spoken or not.

1:46:10.7 Rachael: Yes, listening to the animals, listening to what nature's doing. That's where I think the key to my spiritualism is.

1:46:18.5 Abi: [Thank you and wrap up].

[END OF TRANSCRIPT - 106 MINS]