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Interviewee's forename: Fiona Susannah Grace	
Name(s) used: Fi	
Title: Ms	
Key Roles in the BBC: filing clerk; trainee reporter for local radio; co-host breakfast show GLR; independent producer 'The Ad Break'; presenter 5 Live; presenter 'The Travel Show' on BBC2; host of Radio 4's 'Broadcasting House'; host of Radio 4's 'Saturday Live'; presenter of an occasional documentary series on parenthood for Radio 4 and the World Service; introducer Radio 4's 'Listening Project'; presenter for Radio 4's 'Shared Experience'; presenter for the BBC podcast 'Fortunately'	
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Summary

Fi Glover, interviewed by Margaretta Jolly at her home in London, talks about her time working at the BBC.

Initially, Glover talks about her upbringing in Slough and Basingstoke and then at the age of four moving to live in Hong Kong. She reminisces about her early relationship with BBC radio and more generally television.

Glover talks about her education at school and university and explains that she is more interested in facts than fiction.

Glover reminisces how she took a job as a filing clerk for BBC News and Information Department as a steppingstone to getting onto a trainee reporter scheme. She tells the story of how she was promoted from the position as a reporter to co-host for GLR's breakfast show and then taking over driving the desk for the show. She tells anecdotes about the show and its guests and reflects on its liveliness and popularity.

Glover talks about making a series of weekly programmes called The Ad Break for 5 Live before leaving GLR to work on various programmes for 5 Live. She reflects on newsroom culture and the stress associated with trying not to make mistakes. She talks about making a mistake live on radio and being ticked off by her bosses before reflecting on the current broadcasting landscape with the additional pressure of social media.

She tells the story of how she got the job of presenter for The Travel Show and details the demanding but enjoyable schedule of travelling across the world in a short period of time. She explains the programme's use of a style guide to ensure that the show was different from Holiday.

Glover speaks at length about the 9/11 attack in the United States and working for 5 Live on that night. She goes on to talk about her time as host of Radio 4's Sunday morning programme Broadcasting House. She mentions the time that Matthew Bannister took over from her whilst she was on maternity leave and goes on to talk about becoming the host of Saturday Live. She also talks about the need for the BBC and other employers to do more about shared parental leave and about the occasional series she presented for Radio 4 on parenthood.

She talks at length about how content needed to change to adapt to the digital world and the need to make audio differently, including the greater use of independent audio production companies.

Glover talks at extended length about Radio 4's The Listening Project detailing its history, aim, and scope. She explains how it is partnered by local

radio; the BBC structures in Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland; and the British Library. She describes the process from start to finish, from the project being contacted by a member of the public to scripting and broadcasting. Glover then gives some examples of her favourite conversations and reflects on how the talks have changed over time. She also highlights in detail the duty of care that the project has towards the contributors and stresses that, unlike reality TV, the project is not looking for drama. Glover also talks about the background to the adding of animation to some of The Listening Project conversations and explains why she would not want to see photographs of the participants.

She talks about the programme Shared Experience where she interviews a wide range of people and considers the need to be very careful in a situation people do not have the right to reply. She also talks about the tightrope that the programme was walking on.

Glover considers the role of pitch and accent in the choice of radio contributors, mentioning prejudice against people with particular voices and talks about progress towards addressing this.

She talks about the success of the podcast Fortunately and working with Jane Garvey before going on to discuss Woman's Hour and its social and political role.

Glover considers the changes in tone and direction of Radio 4 wanted by Controller Mohit Bakaya. She also talks about changes in emphasis on The Listening Project which will move to include people who do not know each other – creating a public space.

She talks about the group Sound Women and its campaign to promote both the recognition of the role of women on radio and the need to meet the needs of female listeners. She details some of the group's activities including providing workshops and visiting Parliament. She notes the quotas brought in by Tony Hall were in direct response to research by Sound Women.

Glover considers the problem of differing pay scales at the BBC and explains the difficult task of making meaningful comparisons. She notes that experience is not always rewarded.

She talks about new talent at the BBC, the new Annie Nightingales, Jane Garveys and Jenni Murrays. She considers the difficult launch of BBC Sounds and predicts that it will triumph, and the issue of whether the licence fee will still be around in 20 or 30 years.

Glover talks about issues of compliance and editorial decisions in relation to controversies around Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross; the Iraq/Gilligan affair; and the Savile case, and she considers how this has affected her work.

She considers Greg Dyke's 2001 comment that "the BBC is hideously white and middle class" and hopes that this is now out of date. She comments on the Reithian mission to educate, inform, and entertain, noting that it is still there in commissioning meetings, and suggests that the word "represent" should be added to the list.

She concludes with a brief description of the BBC comedy show W1A, reflecting on the bizarre world it exposed and how much the audience loved it.

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Transcript

Q: [0:00:12] This is Margaretta Jolly and I'm with Fi Glover. It's 16 January 2020 and we are in your home in London. This interview as you know is to feed into the Connected Histories of the BBC Project and we will talk a lot about life at the BBC and the many contributions you've made, but could we begin with a little bit about your own background. So I know you were born in 1969, but could you tell us where, and a little bit about the house that you were coming into?

A: [0:00:44] So I was born in Slough and my mum had me when she was 24 years old. Her and Dad had been married for I think only four years. I've got an older sister as well. So we all lived in a tiny house just, I think, in between Ascot and Slough that I can't remember at all 'cause they moved pretty soon afterwards. And Dad had recently come out of the army. He came from a service family, so if you're a Glover [laughs] you just went into the army – I don't think there was much choice. And Dad had done that for a couple of years and then he bought himself out and he ended up working in financial services, I think he was selling life insurance at the time. And we moved, I think about three or four years afterwards, to a tiny village just outside Basingstoke in Hampshire, so all of my early life is in the south-east of England.

Q: [0:01:42] And could you describe what sort of physical surroundings you had in your bedroom, or where did you spend most of your time in the house?

A: [0:01:51] Oh goodness, so when we lived in North Waltham, the village outside Basingstoke, I – those memories are very powerful aren't they, those first memories, and obviously I remember the house as being

enormous, but it wasn't [laughs]. But there was just loads and loads of nature all around us, and my mum was a very keen gardener and I have really, really strong memories – much more so being outside than being inside the house. And I just remember Mum always trying to get us to garden. My first memories are of her trying to get me to plant pansies [laughs]. And we had dogs and vegetables were growing everywhere and it was kind of leafy, I mean, it was a leafy early childhood. And all of those memories of the seasons actually are really powerful ones, you know, of the snows coming and frosty mornings. And actually our house being really cold all the time and having condensation dripping down the inside of the windows, which is a thing that I think modern children [laughs] just don't get to experience, and I suppose that's a good thing. So, yeah, all of my memories are a definitely kind of countryside beginning, but my dad then went to work in Hong Kong, so we then had a very extraordinary lift from that tiny little world to this world of business and heat, humidity, total change.

Q: [0:03:24] How old were you when you moved?

A: [0:03:25] So I was only four when we went to Hong Kong and we stayed there for two years and then I think it was a difficult – it was quite a difficult life for families in Hong Kong. I don't think my mum hugely enjoyed it. It's a really male environment. I think at the time, you know, there were still things like signs, you know, up in bars – I remember there was one at the golf club that Dad played at that said 'No spikes. No women' on the terrace. I mean, it's those kind of – you look back and you go, oh okay, that's – I wouldn't have wanted to live that life or bring my kids up in that kind of life. So Mum came back with us, Dad stayed in Hong Kong, and we then went back every holiday to – you know, with my mum initially but then they separated so then we used

to go back to go and stay with Dad in Hong Kong, my sister and I, on really, really long plane journeys [laughs]. At quite a young age actually, you know, travelling in between the two places. And sometimes I think actually that had a huge influence on what I then ended up doing as a job. 'Cause I think sometimes in childhood if you've really, really had to entertain yourself for vast periods of time, your imagination does become your friend. And quite a lot of people, you know, who've ended up in radio seem to have just a tiny similar thing that's there in their childhood, that they really did have to make their own entertainment. Quite a lot of people have, you know, memories of having their own radio station in their bedrooms. I know that Jeremy Vine had Vine FM, and Jane Garvey had Radio Garvey [laughs]. And I think my love of radio, some of it comes from radio having been my friend definitely, you know, when we were living in the countryside, and then having to just – you know, almost having a constant kind of conversation in your head, you know, if you find yourself on 24-hour flights going to what seems like the middle of nowhere at quite a tender age.

Q: [0:05:41] Why would radio be more suitable for a child maybe lonely or at least needing to create a world, than television?

A: [0:05:49] Well, because radio is your friend. I think TV comes at you, TV's a performance and you're in the audience and you're quite far removed from it, but radio is your friend. And all great radio presenters, people think of them as being their friends. And that's what you're trying to create. I mean, I used to listen to a lot of Radio 1 and I used to make Mum put Radio 1 on in the car when she took us to school, and I mean, never has a knob been redialled more quickly than back to Radio 4 as soon as we were out of the car 'cause she really – you

know, she didn't like music radio at all. But I remember the Radio 1 Breakfast Show which was Mike Read at the time. I remember it just bouncing out of the radio as this incredibly warm, fantastic club, where everyone was having a good time, I was part of it and it's just that unique combination where it feels like you're in your own world, but you're also part of this huge thing that's much, much bigger. And some TV will do that, I think sometimes the talent shows and something like *Strictly*, you know, does that now, but radio is a powerful, powerful connection of the individual, I think, much more, much more.

Q: [0:07:06] Thank you, that's fascinating and takes me to the question about other memories you might have of media in your house growing up. I mean, was it always the BBC, for example? Which other channels?

A: [0:07:17] Gosh, good questions. So, I don't think it would ever have been anything other than the BBC. So my – I remember Dad buying Mum two radio sets on one of her birthdays and thinking that was so extravagant, [laughs] two radio sets, and one was for the kitchen and one was, I don't know, somewhere else in the house and they were always on. And my mum wasn't and still isn't actually a huge fan of television, and we didn't have a TV for quite a long time as kids because she wanted us to, you know, be outside and be reading and be doing other things. So the radio was always there, but Mum would all – I mean, I don't think Mum's ever returned her radio set, so it's been on Radio 4 for – I mean, she's 77 now, it's been on Radio 4 for a long time, so I know that I would have heard that around us. And then when I started listening to radio it would have been Radio 1. I remember doing that thing where I used to tape the chart show, and by tape – and people my age will really remember this, where you put

your cassette player next door to a radio, 'cause actually most of them didn't have the same function on them. So you had your little tranny radio and then you had your cassette player and you'd press, you know, your play and record and you would record what was coming out of the radio. That would see me through until about Wednesday. But yes, it would always have been the BBC actually. I didn't discover commercial radio until I moved away from home and went to university, so yeah, always the BBC.

Q: [0:08:55] You said you weren't initially allowed a TV, or your mum wouldn't have one. When you got one, why did you get one and where was it in the house, and who sat in what formation around it?

A: [0:09:07] So it would have been in our living-room, it would have been tiny. I mean, Mum was just very anti-TV so we never had a room that was arranged around the TV, and it used to make my friends laugh. I mean, as teenagers because they'd walk into our living-room and they'd say, "Where's the TV?" and it was kind of hidden under a table [laughs], so if we wanted to watch it we had to sit on the floor. It was kind of like no, we don't have one of those things, so it was very – yeah, it was very hidden away. But at the same time, I remember watching TV, you know, with my mum and my sister so the TV must have kind of been in and out of our lives. The moment at which it was banned was on a Saturday afternoon when we were living near Basingstoke and it blew up during an edition of Black Beauty. And my sister and I were devastated. I mean, imagine, imagine. And, you know, our first question would have been, you know, "When can we get a new one?" And I really clearly remember my mum saying, "We're not getting one," you know, with a slight glee, "We're not. We're not going to do that," [laughs]. So I don't know how Black Beauty ends – I'm

joking [laughs]. So that would have been for a couple of years and by the teenage years, a TV was back in the house. But I'm not sure – it was never a huge kind of focal point and when Dad came back from Hong Kong and stayed with us, suddenly there'd be sport on all Saturday afternoon and some of Sunday, which I think I've rather gallantly try to carry on watching, you know, when he'd gone back to Hong Kong. I do have memories of Dickie Davies' World of Sport and thinking, is some of this sport [laughs]? 'cause they had to do quite a lot of filing with darts, skittles and all kinds of stuff, not having had all of the big games covered. But yeah, it was definitely – I am able to remember more radio people than I am TV people, and often, you know, when people are telling those anecdotes about their childhood and those cultural references, I am well aware of the fact that I don't really have them. You know, so people will talk about, you know, from really early childhood stuff like Bagpuss and what was the Camberwick Green one? You see, I don't even know what that was in, but they'll make these references and these jokes and I – you know, it's kind of over there, but I can't – you know, I'm not – I don't immediately know everything that they're talking about.

Q: [0:11:47] You mentioned your father mostly living in Hong Kong.

A: [0:11:50] Yeah.

Q: [0:11:51] What about the media in his life? When you went to stay, do you remember anything about that? Different channels? A television there?

A: [0:11:58] So Dad had a TV in Hong Kong in a much more kind of prominent way, and I think because we were living in a tiny flat, quite a long way away from the centre of Hong Kong, my sister and I inevitably watched way more TV over there than we did, you know – that was available to us back in the UK. And Dad had a collection of videos. I mean, only about five or six that we did watch over and over and over again. 'Cause we'd quite often go and stay with him for, you know, three week holidays and if the weather was rubbish or there was a typhoon or, you know, we just couldn't go anywhere, so we watched The Sound of Music – I've probably watched that, I mean, hundreds of times, hundreds of times. The Eagle Has Landed which is quite a strange movie actually for, you know, two relatively young girls. Mash, which makes me laugh to this day, I've watched that at least a hundred times. So the same thing over and over again, and they didn't have a huge number of channels available in Hong Kong. I can't remember really watching anything live on television over there at all.

Q: [0:13:16] So just to get a few specifics.

A: [0:13:18] Yes.

Q: [0:13:19] Would you mind saying the company your father worked for or the district he lived in?

A: [0:13:23] No, not at all. So Dad – when Dad went to Hong Kong he went to work for Jardine Matheson, a big finance and trading company. He then left and set up his own tiny company and he sold financial services, that's what he did for 20/25 years. We lived in a

place called Tai Tam in Hong Kong which is the other side of the island to the main kind of Hong Kong city and it's – I mean, it was a good – it's a really, really, really windy journey round to the other side of the island, and we lived in a small flat looking out across the sea. He was there for quite a long time, then we moved to a district called Pok Fu Lam which was slightly closer to the centre. And he was there from 1976 to 1996, and then he came back for a couple of years and then went back to Hong Kong for a couple of years, and then retired in Hampshire.

Q: [0:14:25] And what was his full name?

A: [0:14:28] So his name, he was William Henry Glover, but always known as Bill, so he was Bill Glover, and very sadly he died about 14 years ago.

Q: [0:14:38] Now, it's interesting to me, your mother you haven't given a profession to. So could you tell me her name and what did she do as it were?

A: [0:14:46] Yes, so my mum is Priscilla. She married again, so she's now Priscilla [Mona Sharpe 0:14:53] but she was Cilla Glover. She was a medical secretary when she met my dad and she then had the two of us, my older sister Izi and me, and didn't work until we were quite old. She went back to university in my teenage years, so when she would have been in her 40s and she aced it. She got a first in art and education and she became a primary school teacher, and she did that for about ten years. She moved back to Scotland where her family was from after my parents finally separated, so she taught up there for a number of years. And then she retired and now lives near

Swindon. Sometimes I get confused [laughs], both my parents married again, so yeah, I think I've got all of that right.

Q: [0:15:51] What were the names of the schools you went to and brief memory?

A: [0:15:55] Oh, my goodness. So, I went to school in Winchester, I went to a small school called Princes Mead right in the heart of Winchester. I then went to the government school in Hong Kong, then came back and went back to Princes Mead. Then I went to a girls' school in Hampshire called St Swithun's which everyone always laughs at 'cause it sounds like St Trinian's and there are elements of similarities. So I did all of my education there and then went to the University of Kent after that.

Q: [0:16:24] And what did you study?

A: [0:16:25] So I studied classical civilisation and philosophy. I went there to study film and drama and realised it was the wrong course within about a week. And they were immensely helpful and kind and allowed me to change subjects and do something that I really loved instead of something that had looked good from a distance, and for which I had absolutely no talent whatsoever.

Q: [0:16:52] Was it the performing side that you weren't interested in?

A: [0:16:55] Totally. So I realised within the first couple of drama workshops that I had no interest in ever attempting to pretend to be something

else, and just no ability to do that. So actually, what I'd really loved in my education to that point was the finding out of facts. So it just – you know, it was just like I'm not a fiction person and I am not a – I mean, I love, you know, reading other people's fiction, absolutely love it, but for me I really like facts [laughs]. So it was just a sudden dawning realisation, yeah, I was just doing the wrong thing.

Q: [0:17:36] Now, I noticed something you were recorded as giving, a masterclass, that you described your mother or your parents wanting a predictable but stable life for you. Maybe your mother hoping you'd be capable at marriage and perhaps teaching or nursing would be safer than journalism.

A: [0:17:55] Yes, I think everybody told me that, and I think it's not – my story is not unusual that I think there was – I mean, the school that I went to was very good, it was academically very sound, you know, it was by no means a kind of – I didn't receive a slacker's education, it was a good education. But at the same time, I think just because of – I mean, this is the, you know, late 1970s into the early '80s, I think there was a lack of ambition actually in encouraging girls to really pursue their dreams or aptitudes, in a way. And I remember going to the Careers Service when we were making our choices about A Levels and O Levels as they were back then, and saying, you know, "I really, really do want to work in the media." I'm not sure that I even would have called it the media then, but I'm pretty sure that I said, "I want to be a journalist," or "I want to work in radio," you know, and I just remember being told, "Well, that's incredibly difficult, so why don't you think about this?" Which is not – you know, I hope that that's not the go-to level of ambition for most bright but – you know, I was a pain in the arse at school, I – you know, I wasn't the best behaved in class, but I would

hope that, you know, that somebody now with a girl who said, "I want to be something," you know, the reaction wouldn't be [makes a whooshing noise], it wouldn't be to take it down immediately.

Q: [0:19:36] What did they suggest you be, do you remember?

A: [0:19:38] Yes so, you know, have a think about teaching or nursing. So, I mean, I just would have been hopeless at both and a detriment to both professions [laughs], and I just had no aptitude for any of those things. But it was just a – I definitely came away from school with that feeling that if I wanted to do something, I was really going to have to power it myself, you know, it wasn't – nobody said, "Well, why don't you go and get an internship at the local paper," or "Why don't you," you know, "have a radio station in your bedroom?" You know, that just didn't happen. It was like, "No I don't think that'll work," you know, "why don't you try this?"

Q: [0:20:24] It's interesting that this was the late '70s, early '80s –

A: [0:20:27] Yes.

Q: [0:20:29] Or probably a little later in that if you were born 1969 –

A: [0:20:31] Yes, so I did my A Levels when I – that was 1985, yes, yeah.

Q: [0:20:38] And by then, there has been the Women's Liberation Movement.

A: [0:20:41] Yes.

Q: [0:20:42] So, was there no sense of the effects of that or would you think your mother would have described herself as a feminist? Had any interest in that?

A: [0:20:52] Gosh, so it's a really good question. I don't – my mother is a very intelligent and, you know, political with a small p woman, and she definitely brought my sister and I up to feel our independence actually, but at the same time, I don't think we were – no, I don't think we were encouraged to be very kind of active feminists. And the female liberation movement which I subsequently learnt so much about at university, and it was one of the disciplines in philosophy, you know, we looked at the power of feminism and female thought, that's where I discovered all of that. I hadn't discovered it before going to university. And I think some of that is actually having two family lives. So, you know, Hong Kong I think was a very male-dominated world, especially during the 1970s. It was where Dad worked so that was just a – it was kind of – almost a ring-fenced experience. Dad worked over there. And I think Winchester is not a hotbed of, you know, great feminist [laughs] thought and liberation, or at least it didn't enter our classroom, it didn't enter the school. I mean, I just don't remember that feeling like a powerful outside force that I could connect with, you know, in my teenage years.

Q: [0:22:24] Well, let's move on then to your early work because I have that at age 24 you began as a filing clerk on local stations, Somerset Sound, Humberside, Northampton and GLR. So how did that happen and how did that then turn quite quickly I think into something else?

A: [0:22:47] So I started at the BBC as a filing clerk in this extraordinary department called News Information Research which sounded so glamorous and wonderful and newsy and researchy, but actually what it meant, there was a whole band of us very young in our 20s and younger actually, so just very young people on very predictably and understandably low wages, where we cut out articles from newspapers in the morning and we filed them in filing cabinets in the afternoon. Because pre-Google, pre the internet search, if you were a journalist and you wanted to find out your background information on a story you needed a cuttings service, so it was the BBC's cutting service. But I knew when I joined and I'd just seen an advertisement in the paper for it, I knew that it would help me then do what I wanted to do because I didn't want to be a, you know, researcher in a cuttings service. And obviously [laughs], it doesn't exist anymore 'cause as soon as you could press search [makes a whooshing noise], that went. So I knew that it was a helpful thing to do. So I then got a place on the Trainee Reporter Scheme at the BBC and that's where I ended up at all of the local radio stations and doing what I wanted to be doing.

Q: [0:24:06] Before the cuttings service job, I'm realising you must have had a little window –

A: [0:24:14] Yes.

Q: [0:24:15] From graduating. What happened in that time?

A: [0:24:18] Oh, I mean, I just did any old job, I mean, as everybody does. So I worked as a recruitment consultant [laughs], again it makes it

sound grander than it is, I phoned up companies and said, you know, "Do you need any staff," and then put an advert in a window. So I did that for a while. I did my fair amount of waitressing, I tried to work as a secretary and all the while, I did know – I knew that I wanted to get a place on the TRS, the Trainee Reporter Scheme, so all the time I was doing that I was also doing hospital radio and trying to get articles published, all kinds of places. I mean, I had a plan and looking back on it I quite admire my 20-something self actually, because I really eschewed all of the, you know, partying or whatever – as soon as I left university I just wanted to work, I just wanted to work. So I just worked and did everything that I possibly could to kind of create this portfolio that I hoped would get me in.

Q: [0:25:28] So, it obviously did work.

A: [0:25:29] And it worked, yes.

Q: [0:25:32] So tell us about working on the Breakfast Show with Gideon Coe, and early work.

A: [0:25:37] So I started at GLR as a reporter and did all of the horrible shifts for about six months, and then I just got a lucky break and the woman who was doing the breakfast show, co-hosting the breakfast show, Sandy Warr who's lovely and she's a very well-known newsreader in radio, she had an accident and couldn't work for about a month. So I stepped in on the breakfast show and then stayed. She went off to work for IRN, so I stayed doing the breakfast show first of all with Nick Herbert and then with Bill Overton. And both of them left and I made that huge transfer from one side of the desk to the other which is a big

thing actually in radio, and still needs a bit of sorting in terms of female representation. So on a double-headed breakfast show you will have one person who drives the desk and the other person is the co-host, and it's quite an important balance thing because obviously the person who's driving the desk is the person who's very much in control of the show. So I'd been the girl on the other side, and they were quite often girls on the other side [laughs], and then after Bill Overton and Nick left I moved onto that side of the desk and Gid became the co-host on the other side. So it's one of those funny things that now I'm really old and have been in radio a long time [laughs], realise how important it was. And there still aren't enough women doing the driving of the desk, you know, with a co-host of an opposing opposite gender, so it was a big thing actually. It was the first time that GLR had had a woman doing the breakfast show, and I was only about 25/26. I mean, it was madness looking back on it, but it was brilliant. And I still look back on that show with Gid as probably the best work I've ever done, every done, in my broadcasting life. And we only managed to do it for about two years because [laughs] – because we were in our early 20s and Gid loves his music and he was going out to gigs and I loved life and I was going out and, you know, we both just I think became quite tired and 20-something, by the end of a couple of years. But it was very – it was really good fun, I absolutely loved that show, and I loved the station. There was something about GLR which was just caught in the right place at the right time with the right people and the right management, and it was just a brilliant, brilliant radio station to work on.

Q: [0:28:24] What is involved in driving the show technically?

A: [0:28:29] So if you're driving the desk, you've got a massive desk, I mean, it's like the cockpit of a plane. And driving the desk means you are the one who takes control from the previous programme and you are in charge of the sound that you make. So if you imagine on a breakfast show you have about five or six different incoming sources, so you'll have a reporter in a radio car, you've got your travel centre, you've got your weather centre, you've got the main national news, you've probably got two other packages that you're playing in, and on GLR we had music as well. So we were a music and news breakfast show, which doesn't really exist anymore, but it was a complicated show to run. So it was all about timings, a breakfast show is all about timings. People have to leave at 7.27, that's their routine, you know, the travel has to come in at 7.14, so it's a complicated thing to do, but it's also a brilliant thing to do because you are making the sound of your show all the time. And you can play around with it and you can be quite dynamic with it, I mean, it's wonderful, absolutely wonderful. And weirdly, local radio is the only place that it still exists for speech. You know, Five Live and Radio 4 are not driving your own desk shows, that's done the other side of the glass by sound engineers and studio managers, so it's – it remains quite a kind of rare talent to have. Not really usable in any other context in life [laughs].

Q: [0:30:01] You said you can play around with it and you also felt you did some of your best work. Can you remember any examples of what would that – what did that involve?

A: [0:30:10] Yeah, the thing that made it really, really good fun and why that show has such a huge place in my heart is that we wanted to make a programme that was – that did all of the things that was expected of it which is provide the news, provide the information, you

know, get people up and get people out, that's what any breakfast show has to do. But we also wanted to be funny, we wanted to make people laugh at five past seven in the morning, as well as feeling that we were providing absolutely everything else that they could possibly need. And I think for a very short time we pulled it off actually. And there was just something about – I mean, it was the Britpop era in London, it was the beginning of a change in politics in London, it was a really interesting time to be up and about and saying things, and also to be so young. I mean, that's extraordinary, it's what so much of the BBC is now searching for, is the powerful, informative voice of youth and I think for a short time, and I don't think it would have carried on forever anyway, but to use a terrible modern expression, I think we just nailed it. You know, our audience seemed to really like it, I mean, it was a small audience that we were serving. I'm not saying that, you know, we touched all of the people, all of the time, but I think we just did what we wanted to do which was entertain and inform.

Q: [0:31:43] But were there particular little gimmicks or skits or were there particular –

A: [0:31:47] Oh, so there were lots – yeah...

Q: [0:31:46] Guests or were there mistakes? Give us an example?

A: [0:31:50] Yes, so part of – I think part of the appeal of the show was it was quite – sometimes it could be a little technically inept and that's on me, so there would be gaps [laughs] and strange bits and quite a lot of, you know, laughter in the wrong places, so it was kind of self-deprecating in that sense. We had an amazing roster of guests, you

know, quite a few of whom still pop up today. Mark Stephens who's a lawyer who often, you know, crops up talking about important cases, he used to come on once a week and do the newspaper review and be – I mean, always to within the letter of the law, 'cause he's a lawyer, but he'd kind of push the envelope as well. We had lots of tiny little stings that we used to drop in, so I've got [laughs] – this may not be the best example, but I've got a tiny – they were all on [cards 0:32:45], so I've got a tiny [card 0:32:47] sting of Emma Forbes saying, "Fi, sniff my hair." I can't remember what that was from, and we used to do things like we'd just drop that in without referencing anything else in between quite a serious news piece and maybe going to the weather or the travel. And we had lots of little things like that which we just made, you know, and they don't really work in the retelling, but if you think about, you know, a kind of half-an-hour of a programme where as a loyal listener you know that you're going to be made to laugh by a kind of little in-joke. And then hopefully if you're a new listener, you come along and you hear something like that and it just makes you go, oh, good Lord, so it was little things like that. I mean, it just – the show definitely had a different sound to it. And we had a lot of music beds that were, you know, kind of quite odd and maybe laterally thought out. We used to play F.R. David's, Words Don't Come Easy very gently under quite a few of our reviewer guests if they started to, you know, stumble, or if the joke was that they were a bit hungover or something like that. We used to play something called Codewords where we'd ask the listener to send in a coded word that was very difficult, that we would have to use in an interview that was coming up later, and we obviously wouldn't tell the guest that we were trying to work this word or phrase into it. And we'd have to do it with a very straight face. And we did one, Peter Stringfellow came on to talk about something, presumably to do with licensing and one of his clubs, and the code phrase from a listener was "dreadlocking" 'cause at the time he had

dreadlocks. And I think – and I can't remember – I think it was me, but I might have been Gid, we managed to use the sentence, "Do you dread locking your club up at night," as a way of using dreadlocking [laughs]. So it was that kind of challenge where the listener [laughs] – you know, we were kind of on the side of the listeners, but we'd been allowed to make a radio programme. That's what we were – you know, that's what we were trying to do.

Q: [0:34:53] Well, it did obviously get recognition and I have Sony Award for this show that you won.

A: [0:34:59] Yes.

Q: [0:35:01] I don't know which year, if you – do you remember?

A: [0:35:03] I can't remember –

Q: [0:35:03] 1990-something.

A: [0:35:05] Yeah, I can't remember, but yes it did, it made little waves, it did make little waves, yeah.

Q: [0:35:11] So you then went on to join Radio 5 Live.

A: [0:35:15] Yep.

Q: [0:35:18] So tell us about that move and what you did in that job.

A: [0:35:22] So I went to 5 Live and this is the arrogance of youth which is blissful to look back on 'cause I'd never have the gumption to do it again. When 5 Live launched they put out a tender document, a bidding system, because they wanted a series of magazine programmes made by new people and new companies about lots of different things as well as just their news and sport remit. So I was working with a guy called Richard Kilgarriff at GLR, he was one of the reporters there. He was immensely creative, a really, really creative guy, and we decided to put in a bid, and we must have been 26, 25/26 at the time. We put in a bid on a piece of paper, one side of A4, to do a weekly magazine programme for 5 Live called The Ad Break where we would explain, examine, investigate and celebrate the world of advertising, which in the 1990's in London was a massive industry. So this is right at the zenith of Saatchi's success. It was a power – suddenly advertising became a really powerful, really, really creative business. So we did an half-an-hour and we won the bid. I mean, it was extraordinary, you know, we'd never made a whole programme before, we didn't even have a company [laughs], it was just me and Richard. But we won the bid. I mean, 5 Live, you know, saw something in it and just said, "Okay," you know, "we'll run with it," so we both left to go and do that. We made a half-an-hour programme for 52 weeks actually in the first year of 5 Live being on air, and I think 5 Live, they liked it and they said, "Do you want to do some other live shows?" And I wasn't very keen to leave GLR actually, I was very happy doing shows there, but I thought, well, you know, why not, so that was my way in. So I started off doing the weekend breakfast show at 5 Live and then kind of, you know, spread, you know, like a nasty culture across a Petri dish and ended up doing nearly every programme there as a fill-in or stand-in, or as we like to call it in the business, an ambulance-chaser. So, you know, whenever somebody else has gone off sick [laughs], you're the

person going, "I'm here, I can stand in." So I did that for years before actually getting a show of my own there.

Q: [0:37:46] How much, if I can ask, were you paid to make *The Ad Break* documentary, and – I'm just trying to think about where you were living and how you could sustain yourself.

A: [0:37:58] Well, so really – very good question. So looking back on it, we were paid a lot because it enabled both Richard and I to run ourselves as a business and make the money that we were both making, which wasn't huge at all, but I think we were probably – gosh, I don't want to kind of misquote this, but we were definitely – I think the budget for the programme was probably £2,000 an episode. And, you know, bearing in mind that it was just us – I mean, we used to work overnight on a Friday night to make it, and so we paid I think, you know, a tiny fee to take over a studio that wasn't being used overnight. And we'd literally – we'd start work at ten o'clock and we'd finish at four o'clock in the morning, and we'd make all of these packages and then, you know, these tired, world-weary two people, you know, would sit down and record ourselves at three-thirty in the morning, and then tidy up the tape and hand it in. I mean, it's no way to work [laughs] for a sustained period of time, but yeah, I mean, it was a proper business. We set up our own company, we made other programmes after that, but it was a doable thing, yep. Which is very odd looking back on it 'cause I'm pretty sure some of the budgets at the BBC have not changed, and that was 20 – over 20 years ago.

Q: [0:39:20] Where were you living?

A: [0:39:21] I was living in Battersea, I was sharing a flat in Battersea in south London with friends from – you know, various friends from university, here, there, and everywhere kind of people as, you know, a lot of 20-somethings were. That interchangeable flat arrangement.

Q: [0:39:42] So you – as you said you branched out. Again, it sounds as if your talent was being recognised, but I wondered if you had something general you could say about newsroom culture. We've interviewed other people who've made observations on newsroom culture in the '80s and I'm thinking this is now ten years on. Is there anything you could say? It's rather general.

A: [0:40:08] Gosh, newsroom culture. So I've got a very different view of newsroom culture now that I am an older woman actually, and I don't think as a 20-something I realised quite how sometimes difficult a newsroom could be for young women. I mean, it's – I don't think the BBC's the worst in this regard at all, I mean, some of the stories that come out of Fleet Street are really horrifying about how young people in general are treated. And I suppose by that I mean, it's just a – it's a culture where bravado prevails and at the same time, it's incredibly pressurised, it is very stressful, you've really got to get it right first time, and so looking back on it now realising how vulnerable you are with no experience. You don't really have resilience; you're still building your resilience. There's a huge amount of criticism. I mean, if you get something wrong in a newsroom, it's massive. You know, it's libellous, it's difficult, it's out there, it's an amplified mistake every time. And I don't remember – I remember really enjoying it and really enjoying the excitement, not really understanding the stress of it, but it is definitely stressful. And not really understanding that kind of hierarchy which I can see now is really quite profound. All the newsrooms I've worked in

were run by big alpha males, and you fitted in as the young woman at the bottom, and you did everything, and you took the jokes, and if you were lucky you could answer back and then you kind of built a wall around yourself. But it was definitely, you know, quite a challenging place to be. And I think the point about making mistakes is just really not talked about enough, 'cause I think lots of people leave a newsroom to go and work in a slightly different environment of arts or culture or entertainment or whatever, just because when you're young and cutting your teeth if you've cocked up, you know, it is an enormous thing that you're not really helped through. And it's one of those things, isn't it, I mean, it must be exactly the same for junior hospital doctors. You know, the first couple of times that you make a mistake with a patient, the impact is absolutely enormous, but how do you get that experience from the top, you know, all the way down to the bottom when the people who tend to succeed are the people who aren't particularly helpful. You know, the makeup of a really unbelievably talented newshound editor is probably not one of empathy, caring, kindness and understanding [laughs], but you do need that at the bottom. So it's all swirling around. I think it is quite – it is a tough place to be. And I would not have wanted to stay in the newsroom as a news reporter for all of my career. I think I recognised that my talent lay elsewhere and that I just wasn't cut out for that, you know, quite pounding level of stress. That's not what I really got off on.

Q: [0:43:38] Do you remember any mistakes that you or someone else made that you were witness to?

A: [0:43:44] Well, there were a couple of mistakes. Obviously on the Trainee Reporter Scheme there were 12 of us who did the Reporter Scheme together and, you know, we always kept in touch and, you

know, it was a really lovely crowd to be a part of, and I know that a couple of them went on to their local radio station. So you had to work on three different local radio stations after you'd done your training in London, and a couple of them did make mistakes where they – which included libel or it included, you know, inaccurate facts being broadcast, and they had a really, really, really tough time. And, you know, those mistakes were genuine mistakes, they were mistakes through inexperience and just not recognising in the moment that something had been said, you know, that needed to be rectified. So I – my own mistake, and it was a bad one, was I repeated a libel that was on the front page of The Sun newspaper and I repeated it during a newspaper review on the breakfast show. And I presume I'm okay to say it now [laughs], but it was a report that Tiggy Legge-Bourke who was the nanny to the Princes William and Harry when they were very tiny, it was a report that she had had a miscarriage and that Princess Diana had whispered in a kind of stage whisper to her to deliberately embarrass her, "So sorry about the baby," and that was the headline on the front page of The Sun. So I repeated that in a, you know, I'm your breakfast show host, today's newspapers, here they come. I read it out and there was a libel case off the back of it because that had never been said or shouldn't have been reported, but I had repeated that as a libel. So I got a massive, massive ticking off for that.

Q: [0:45:43] So I'm interested actually –

A: [0:45:44] Yeah.

Q: [0:45:46] If you could say what the process was and I'll say also while we're recording that I don't believe what you said is libellous in that you've said this was a mistake and I'm not saying this is any kind of

truth. But we can always close this piece if [both talking at once] any kind of question.

A: [0:46:01] Yeah. But no, it's very interesting and I'm really happy – yeah, I mean, I'm very happy to talk about it because I mean, it's no – you know, it would no longer be considered to be an active case by anybody's stretch of the imagination. And I think the point was, it was – obviously pre-Leveson in a big way – it was tittle-tattle that had not been verified by anybody, and it had been put on the front page of a newspaper as fact. And so, journalistically I should have known to stand back from that and certainly to not repeat it. So my wiser more experienced self would now know that you wouldn't read that out verbatim. You would say something like, "Today The Sun newspaper carries a story where an allegation is made that something rather unpleasant was said in a vindictive way between these two people," but you wouldn't repeat the actual thing. But at the time, I didn't have the experience or the knowledge to know that, and just in that split second, you know, I made the wrong call. So I was ticked off, I mean, you know, rightly so, I'm not saying that it wasn't a mistake, by editorial policy and my editors and, you know, we sat down and had a long chat about that very, very fine line between what you're allowed to re-report. And it was a huge problem, I mean, it is less of a problem now because the newspapers have to be more careful post-Leveson about exactly what it is that they're reporting. And you wouldn't have a front page like that anymore and we all know much more now about the kind of ways and means that some stories have been got hold of. So, you know, it would be – I wouldn't make that mistake again, but I – you know, I definitely did at the time. And it was a frightening experience because [sighs] I hadn't – it was the first time that, you know, that I'd crossed that line. We spent a lot of time in training learning our journalistic law and particularly about libel because in radio it's a

massive area of pitfall, because you're often live, you're often asking people who you don't – you know, you don't know what their response is going to be, and you're often asking them very personal things or talk about other people. Most speech radio is people taking about other people [laughs], that's just what it is. So we'd spent a lot of time, you know, discussing what line might be crossed and what line wouldn't have been. And it made me – you know, it definitely made me better at being kind of in control of the conversation and my head, so yep.

Q: [0:48:56] So you were given a ticking off, but nothing more than that.

A: [0:49:03] No, so I suppose I may well have had a black mark – I mean, I don't quite know – I don't know from the other side, from the editorial side, you know, whether literally whenever your name comes up [laughs], you know, in a file there's a great big black mark so, you know, "liability on air," I don't know what happens. I mean, I suspect that I got a telling-off, I expect that the editor of the breakfast programme at the time and probably the editor of the station had to explain to editorial policy at the BBC that I'd been spoken to and I understood the problem, and it would never happen again. I mean, as far as I know, you know, nothing ever – I never got a ticking off like that again and I don't think I had another kind of incident with editorial policy, but presumably somewhere, yeah, someone wrote it up somewhere.

Q: [0:49:59] But on the other side as you've suggested, maybe there wasn't much support and it's very easy to make a mistake like that. It sounds incredibly easy to make such mistakes. I'm fascinated with your comparison to medical trainees. Do you think now there is more inhouse support?

A: [0:50:19] Whoa [laughs], I don't know. I think it's a very – we're in a really, really complex time for broadcasting because social media has created a different landscape and that's different in terms of not only what people say, but simply how they say it, and then how it's repeated. And I think for broadcasters at the BBC, it's become unbelievably hard to work out where your individual programme stands in that massive landscape because also, if you think about it, when you're on air doing a live speech programme you're also carrying the weight of social media as part of the content of that programme. So you've got your Twitter feed, you've got – you know, you've got any number of social media feeds coming in, you're asking the listener to get in touch with you via those platforms where they're allowed to say things, but actually if you put them on air they might not be allowed to say. So there's a really different series of hurdles that you're being expected to jump over and I think – and I know from some of my colleagues – I'm not doing a live news show anywhere at the moment, but I know from colleagues who are that sometimes it can be more than a minefield and they are making almost daily decisions about really important potentially libellous or offensive things, at the same time as having to maximise free speech. [Laughs] And that collision in the middle I think leaves a presenter incredibly vulnerable and I think some presenters do feel very vulnerable. But that's not to say that the BBC's not helpful or supportive or aware, but I think it's really hard to understand quite how far out you are if you're the person in front of the microphone and controlling everybody else around the microphone. I think it's really, really difficult. And we can't as broadcasters at the BBC say, you know, "We're never going to allow all of that," because the pressure from our licence fee payers is for us to move, you know, is for us to move with all of that incoming, but at the same time never go too far because why would you want to be paying for something that is

offensive and causing more trouble than it's worth? So I don't have any answers to where that ends up, but I think it's an enormous learning curve we're on at the moment, enormous. And I think I would be so much more fearful now if I was on air than I ever was back then, and that's not a good thing because the joy, the absolute joy of brilliant speech radio is being, you know, the most exciting conversation that anyone could possibly be having on any topic. I would – I know that I would have really, really not have the same kind of no fear attitude anymore.

Q: [0:53:35] It's interesting then that you moved to a very different kind of show, The Travel Show. I have this as 1997 to 1999 and you were probably about 27-years-old.

A: [0:53:48] Yes.

Q: [0:53:49] Was there any reason you went in that different direction in relation to what you've been talking about?

A: [0:53:53] No, not connected at all. So The Travel Show was just one of those unbelievable serendipitous things that happened. So, there was a fantastic woman called Liz Warner who I think now runs Comic Relief, who was working for BBC Manchester at the time. They wanted to commission a new travel programme that was kind of independent travel, that sucked up all of that wonderful stuff that was going on, where long-haul travel had suddenly opened up and, you know, travel was cheaper, and they wanted to be doing something a bit more exciting than the holiday programme. And she had heard the GLR breakfast show and really liked it and she phoned up one day, and she

was very funny, and she said, "We're looking for someone who's not really particularly slick or particularly attractive or, you know, particularly experienced in television, I think you might fit the bill," [laughs]. And it was the best description because that was absolutely me at the time. So I went along and did a little audition for her and she said, "Yeah, that seems fine, we'll give you a go," and, you know, off we set around the world. So I used to do – I started off doing pieces with Simon Calder where we'd go to the same place together but try and find different experiences in the same place. The main presenter was Juliet Morris. Jim White was one of the contributors, and it was a great programme actually, it was an absolute little cracker of a programme, and extraordinary. I mean, you know, to be offered a job like that in my 20s when I had no responsibility, I didn't even have cats back then, and could just literally pack a bag and go. It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful, yep.

Q: [0:55:44] How many countries did you visit?

A: [0:55:48] We did 32 countries in three series. So the schedule was pounding, absolutely pounding, and we didn't – you know, it's not like we were rocking around the world in style [laughs]. And also, I do remember that the schedule, it was just bonkers. So there was a three-week period where I flew to Melbourne, we did 48 hours in Melbourne and I flew back, had about four days off, went to Mexico, flew back, and went to the Isle of Mull. And I think that film in the Isle of Mull suffered a bit [laughs], you know, this little girl kind of just wafting from side to side with jetlag. I mean, it was bonkers but, you know, I'm not complaining at all, it was very good fun.

Q: [0:56:35] I was thinking about the function of travel shows –

A: [0:56:38] Yeah.

Q: [0:56:41] And particularly in light of your many different contributions, thinking about dailiness and the everyday. We'll talk more about that later but, you know, could you say something about what you think people get out of watching travel shows?

A: [0:56:54] So I think travel shows are – they tick so many boxes for the view because they're escapism, they are entertaining, they can be informative, they, you know, literally take you somewhere else. And I don't really understand why there aren't more of them still on television, because there is just something wonderful. And especially if you're in the company of someone, you know, who you like or, you know, who makes you laugh or whatever, their experiences in different places are just absolutely wonderful. You know, they release you from the mundane, you know, they mean you don't have to go there too. I think they're just terrific. I mean, I would quite happily sit down every evening, you know, especially when you're caught in that kind of routine of family life and, you know, everyday can seem a little bit the same. I would watch one every night, you know, that just takes me somewhere sunny and wonderful. And we always used to laugh on The Travel Show [laughs] that – so one of the rules, we had a little kind of notebook, a style guide, that had – 'cause The Travel Show had to be different from Holiday, we had to justify our existence. So we always paid our way, that was a big thing, so we literally paid for the holidays that we then went on, we paid for the nights in the hotels and all of that type of stuff, so that was very important. And also, one of the style guides I remember was, we were never allowed to end a piece to camera like they did on the holiday show by going, "Cheers," [laughs]

because actually, that's everywhere, you know, on big, you know – and I noticed it the other night on – I was watching Jane McDonald's travel programme over on Channel 5 and there were quite a lot of "Cheers," going on at the end with a beautiful sunset in the background and stuff. And we weren't allowed to do that, 'cause that's not what we were trying to do. We weren't trying to go kind of, you know, look at smug-arse, we're having a great time, we were trying to tell people, you know, where to go and what to do, and the reality of travel. But inevitably, you know, we'd do our pieces to camera and depending on which camera crew we were with, everybody at the end of a piece to camera around the back of the crew would go, "Cheers." And that was our kind of, yep, we've nailed it again, haven't we? But I think it's an interesting quandary at the moment as well, isn't it? If we talk about our need to change our actions and our attitudes towards travel because of climate change, how much better if you just send one crew off to go and look at these things, tell you about them, entertain them, you know, instead of 600 people who've looked at Brian from Hertfordshire on TripAdvisor and, you know, decided that they want to go down the same thing. You know, you can be – I think you can be a responsible broadcaster and be showing people all of these things and letting them experience it, you know, as part of a solution to the problem of everybody going everywhere all the time. And I also think there's an enormous room for people taking apart the terrible over-tourism that lots of parts of the world suffer from, by just letting, you know, one other person go instead of everybody having to experience it for themselves. But it would be difficult to commission because you would be seen as part of the problem, not the solution, so perhaps that's why there ain't so many going through the commissioning channels at the moment.

Q: [1:00:34] Tell me about the book that you then wrote, Travels With My Radio, yes, tell me about that.

A: [1:00:41] So Travels With My Radio came obviously off the back of The Travel Show and a very nice woman from Random House phoned me up and said, "Do you want to write while you're making The Travel Show?" And I think actually The Travel Show was just about to come to an end so I said, "Well, you know, I don't think that's possible, but I've always wanted to write a book about radio stations around the world, so could I go and do that?" And she said, "Yes, why not give it a go?" So on the world's smallest advance [laughs] I took off round the world, and actually I didn't make it all the way round the world because the advance meant that I couldn't, so I made it kind of west and not very east. But I'd always listened – so wherever I go and I still do it today, I'd always taken a tiny little wind-up radio or, you know, a little transistor radio with me whenever I travelled and always tried to find the local station and just leave that on in a hotel room and wake up to that in the morning. Because a breakfast show will tell you everything that you need to know about where you are, and it just makes you – it stops you feeling like the visitor. It makes you feel that you instantly know, you know, the community that you're visiting. So I'd always really loved doing that, and local radio stations around the world back then were just bonkers. I mean, just wonderfully, wonderfully eccentric, and entertaining and – it was just a very different broadcasting world. You would struggle to find so many local radio stations now because there's been this huge amalgamation. Because you can sell advertising, you know, just by pressing a button on an algorithm and send different adverts out to 27 different branded radio stations that will be, you know, unique to that area, you don't need local radio stations anymore. But before all of that happened you needed local radio stations to literally tell you about the restaurant down the road, you

know, or the swimwear sale that was on at the local rec or, you know, whatever it was. So there were many more local radio stations and they were all – all the ones that I visited were absolutely brilliant. I mean, some of them daft, really daft, and – yeah, all of them wonderful.

Q: [1:03:01] What about the title?

A: [1:03:02] So, what the I Am an Oil Tanker title? So that comes from a great – it's not really a spoonerism it's a kind of cock-up that is said to have been made by the wonderful Dickie Arbiter who was a former press secretary to the Queen and then newsreader on IRN. And he just – and I've done it myself, he went into a news bulletin and just got a little bit confused with the opening and he said, "I'm an oil tanker, Dickie Arbiter's ablaze in the Gulf," instead of, "I'm Dickie Arbiter, there's an oil tanker ablaze in the Gulf." And I phoned him up obviously, to check the veracity of that story and he's a lovely, lovely guy, and he just laughed when I said it and I don't think he can even remember saying it. And it's one of those things that maybe he didn't actually say, but it's become a kind of urban myth in the radio world. And he very generously said, "Yes, you can use that [laughs] as the title of your book." And it is a very generous thing to do because I wouldn't like to be remembered by a mistake. You know, there's so much more to his career than that, but it was very kind of him to let me use it. But also, it says everything about radio, you know, that sometimes it's funnier when it goes wrong, that we don't take ourselves that seriously, and also, you don't know from one hour to the next what it is that's on the sheet of paper in front of you. So all of those things came together in one moment for him [laughs].

Q: [1:04:32] I have it that you were living in New York at the time.

A: [1:04:37] No, gosh, I didn't move to New York until years later. So no, I wrote Travels With My Radio when I was still at 5 Live, I was doing the late-night show at 5 Live when it came out, and I only moved to New York 2004 I think, much later. So I think the book came out in 2000, yeah.

Q: [1:05:02] Okay, well, I'll ask this question anyway –

A: [1:05:02] Yes.

Q: [1:05:03] Because I think it's just interesting, which is do you remember what you were doing on September 11th 2001 when the attack on the World Trade Centres happened?

A: [1:05:14] Yeah, so I was at 5 Live. So I did the evening show and we did five hours. So I remember turning on the – so I was doing late nights which usually were from ten until one, and I remember turning on the radio when I woke up, you know, which was always quite late in the day, you know, 'cause I didn't get home to about half-past-two in the morning. And I'd piddled around, you know, during the day, I'd gone for a kip that was it and I woke up and it was Simon Mayo on 5 Live reporting this extraordinary thing. And actually, it's one of the very few times that I've gone from the radio to the TV immediately, 'cause it was one of those stories where you couldn't understand it unless you were seeing it. I mean, Simon did a brilliant job of explaining, you know, that something had happened, but when the second plane went into the building I defy anybody who had a TV in the room not to have

switched it on. So I watched that unfold and my editor Rhian Roberts phoned and she said, you know, "This is massive, come in now," so I got to work about seven o'clock that evening and we went on air at ten and we did five hours instead of the normal three. Because obviously by that time in this country, you know – it's very odd looking back on that day because we knew the how and the when, but we didn't know the why and the who. And the why and the who started to emerge, you know, during the night and yeah, I mean, it was an extraordinary night of broadcasting, really extraordinary. And I think it's one of those very odd things that you never want to say that you live for an event like that, but actually when you look around – I remember on that evening that everybody just gave their best self at 5 Live, and 5 Live is an extraordinary station. I think they do really some of the best radio journalism in the country, because they never know what's going to happen next and everybody rose to the occasion. So there wasn't an area that we didn't start talking about, you know, over the first 24 hours, you know, we – I think we handled – there was just such an enormous amount of horror, I mean, proper visceral horror at the loss of life, and a lack of understanding about what might be coming next. And that's quite a difficult thing when something like that is happening, to not make people feel physically sick by what you're reporting, but at the same time being realistic about what the situation is. And it was just extraordinary, but I think everybody managed that balance terrifically well. And it's odd isn't it, I mean, we look back on it now, it changed the world forever and in those first couple of days and weeks trying to find the words to express that was incredibly difficult, but also really important. You know, it just wasn't a story that you were then going to watch drop down the news bulletins when you moved onto something else. All our worlds had to change, our expertise, our understanding, just the simple way that we talked about different people, it all had to change. It was – I mean, just from a news perspective it was just

remarkable. And also, just horrendous actually, just horrendous. Because sometimes when you find yourself in a news studio, you know, you're – and I remember that night, somebody on the team, one of the producers, literally just opened the door to the studio and just said, "There's an Egyptian person coming in," and I know that that kind of sounds funny now, but there were so many different perspectives that we needed to get and the production team were amazing, they just phoned up every single person. So the Egyptian Ambassador turned up in the studio, and you've suddenly got to think as the presenter, what would the relevance of Egypt be? Is there any kind of connection? Are we insinuating something? Should we not be insinuating something? Do we even know what the majority religion might be and if there any connotations for that? You know, all of this whirring stuff that's in your head, and at the same time in front of you is a piece of paper saying, you know, we now know, you know, that 274 people have died. We now know that seven children are dead. And so to have those two things going on and trying never to let one outweigh the other because it would be awful to stop talking about the loss of life because you got very involved in a conversation about the Middle East, is a very odd thing to do, but everybody was just brilliant, brilliant.

Q: [1:10:07] Well, we're now going to go to something different which is your next main work with Broadcasting House.

A: [1:10:15] Oh, yes.

Q: [1:10:17] Unless I'm missing something in between, but I have that was your next big show.

A: [1:10:21] It was, yes, yep. So I went to Radio 4 – yes [laughs], so Broadcasting House was Eddie Mair's kind of spin-off show on Radio 4 on Sunday morning and he'd – I mean, it was just – it was Eddie Mair's show. So I never really understood why it was called Broadcasting House, I mean, obviously there must have been some kind of clever joke in there somewhere. It was always very confusing. So yes, Mark Damazer who was the Controller of Radio 4 at the time, he phoned up and said, you know, "We'd like to give you a go on this because Eddie –" so I suppose Eddie would have moved to doing PM full-time, I honestly can't remember the reason why he had stopped, but yes, they asked me to go to Radio 4. Which I was a bit hesitant about, if I can be honest, at the start because I couldn't really hear myself doing that programme and I think you do always have to be able to hear yourself, 'cause you're literally going to have to hear yourself [laughs]. So, yeah.

Q: [1:11:37] Why couldn't you?

A: [1:11:38] Because Eddie is a one-off and he's got the most unbelievably clever, funny, you know, kind of almost sometimes sly sense of humour, and he just did it really brilliantly and he had all his motifs in the programme and his way of doing things, and they were just very, very big shoes to fill. And I – yeah, I mean, I think if I can be really honest, I think it's probably the programme that I've done worst in my career, and I just never really felt that I nailed it or made it my own. And 5 Live, you know, I'd been doing three-hour shows that were just – I mean, it sounds – you know, I sound like some terrible kind of megalomaniac, but they're your shows when you're on 5 Live, as in – not as in you have editorial control but, you know, you're the main presenter and everything, you know, comes in and you're trying to – you're like a

hostess or a host for three hours. But it's very much they're shows that are built around the news coming in and your ability to, you know, simply enhance, translate and kind of compute that. Broadcasting House was a built programme. You built it, you know, over the three pre-production days before it went to air on the Saturday morning, and I don't think I ever really quite brought all of those other things from 5 Live to that one hour. It wasn't really my kind of show actually, so I never huge – if I can be honest, I never hugely enjoyed Broadcasting House.

Q: [1:13:27] I wondered about that mix of the light and the serious that it involved and the jam spoon.

A: [1:13:34] Yes.

Q: [1:13:35] Then with the headlines and...

A: [1:13:37] Yep, I mean, it was an odd one. So the whole point of – the remit for Broadcasting House was to bring, you know, some kind of entertainment or acerbic wit across the week's news whilst also really honing-in on something from the week's news. And, I mean, you can do that, you know, lots of programmes are funny at the same time as being serious, but for me anyway I find it hard to build something funny. For me, funny comes out of chat, you know, or throwing things around, or a listener's comment. You know, I'd never done – I'd never built a comedy feature, you know, that's not what I am capable of doing actually. So for me, it just never really gelled. And I think actually – so I think Eddie did it brilliantly and I think Paddy O'Connell now does it brilliantly, and I think that bit in the middle that was me didn't do it

brilliantly at all. I'm not terribly good at structure, structure, structure, structure. I really, really like chat, so...

Q: [1:14:47] Matthew Bannister took over from you when you went on maternity leave. Any – I have anyway, any comments on him?

A: [1:14:54] Oh, Matthew Bannister, so [laughs] he came on our podcast recently actually and he was very funny [laughs]. Because he did an incredible thing, I mean, he was a really, really senior manager at the BBC. So he'd run GLR, he'd run Radio 1, he'd then gone into the executive and then, you know, he popped up saying, "Actually, my first love is presenting, I'll give that a go." And he's done it, I think, really well but, I mean, I think there were loads of people slightly wishing him less than well because it just seemed to be quite an odd move. I mean, nobody ever comes out of the executive management, you know, in front of a microphone. But I like Matthew and I like his style. I mean, it's funny isn't it, maternity leave is an odd thing because I think actually, you know, you go on maternity leave and you have a baby, I've got no idea what anybody else was doing for either my maternity leaves [laughs] because for me, the joy of maternity leave was actually switching everything else just off. And I think especially, you know, with a first baby – I mean, I can't even – I don't think I really listened to him doing Broadcasting House, so – did he do the whole maternity leave? I'm not sure [laughs].

Q: [1:16:10] That's what I have.

A: [1:16:11] Yes, maybe. But I think Paddy O'Connell – 'cause I didn't – yeah, I can't remember.

Q: [1:16:19] Well, let's go on to your maternity leave, now I am – I don't want to hurry 'cause it's so interesting, but – so I have to ask about, yeah, having children, the birth of your son, this other life, the other side of your life, and also of course about managing work/life balance, motherhood/work.

A: [1:16:40] Yes.

Q: [1:16:42] But maybe just start with a little bit about what was happening in your home life and –

A: [1:16:45] So I had my son Hector in 2006, so I was doing Broadcasting House, and I went on maternity leave – I mean, it's so strange. So both my kids are in secondary school now and it's very strange looking back to a pre-kids you, you know, it just seems – it is just another life. I was really – I mean, I was quite old by the time I had Hecky, I was 36, and when I had him I didn't want to think very much about work. And I think I actually managed – I really enjoyed that, I just really enjoyed going, right, I'm having a baby now, bye. Although having said that, Mark Damazer who was the Controller of Radio 4 at the time, he did call about four months into – no actually, less than that, about 12 weeks into my maternity leave saying when I came back would I come back to doing a new show, not to Broadcasting House. And actually, that was an incredibly appealing prospect. So work kind of crept back into maternity leave 'cause we started talking about Saturday Live and doing a new show. So, you know, very sadly Home Truths with John Peel at the helm, after John died it never really retained its sense, 'cause it was such a programme built for John Peel and he'd done it so brilliantly. So the idea was to use that slot with

maybe the same kind of content but do it in a very different way. So we started building Saturday Live. So I had this beautiful baby and, you know, Rick and I, my partner and I, we were making a, you know, as good a fist of first babydom as you possibly can, and work just seemed a million miles away actually, a million miles away. But it was good to go and work on something new. You know, I'm not sure that I would have gone back to Broadcasting House anyway. And it's difficult as well working weekends I think, you know, Rick had a nine – well, actually, you know, nine to nine job, he was working for Sony Europe, you know, between Monday and Friday. Working on a Sunday is difficult because I'd have had to work Saturdays too, you know, all of those things come into play. So I was quite glad to go back to Saturday Live, although looking back on it I do think, oh okay, new baby, new show is quite a lot [laughs], but it all seemed to work out alright in the end, but yeah.

Q: [1:19:25] And where were you living by then?

A: [1:19:25] Oh, so we've lived in east London for 20 – I think I've been in east London for 22 years, so in and around Dalston and yeah, I mean, I would count east London very much as my home now. I can't imagine going anywhere else.

Q: [1:19:45] And if I may, how did you meet your partner?

A: [1:19:49] Oh, so we met through a mutual friend, a friend of mine from university, Marella. So we'd been – you know, we'd kind of been dancing in the same vague circles and then our circles collided, but if

it's alright by you, I don't – I'm not a huge fan of too much of my personal being out there, so – it makes me feel uncomfortable.

Q: [1:20:16] Understood. Maybe just the general principle of him with a sounding like quite high-powered or at least busy job, and you with – having been in a very intense job, coming to the how do you manage the work/life balance?

A: [1:20:34] No, for sure, and I think broadcasting is really difficult for new parents and, you know, there's a lot of work still to be done because inevitably if you're working on a successful programme, it will be at an unpleasant hour of the day. That's just a fact so, you know, breakfast shows are your biggest hitters, you know, lots of programmes are at the weekends, you know, or in the evening. You know, you can't really do a nine to five, Monday to Friday, always in the same place at the same time job. That's just not what broadcasting tends to be. So I think it can be incredibly difficult for new parents, incredibly difficult. And, you know, the BBC is looking at this and has been looking at it for a long time. There's a very, very poor retention rate for returners, so loads and loads of women go back to work and try to juggle those shifts and that kind of lifestyle with childcare and it becomes very difficult. It is largely the women who leave. I think the BBC and every other company in the country has to do more about shared parental leave because, you know, equally there are loads and loads of new dads. You know, I've seen them come into work and, you know, stood in corridors and, you know, given them a helpful hug because they're so exhausted, and yet there's a massive stressful ten-hour news shift ahead of them. I mean, it is tough. And my life wasn't like that at all and I'm not saying that it was, but for me, the big problem ended up which is why I left Saturday Live kind of spool forward four years, my big problem was the working

weekends. So actually, by the time both my kids had started school, I had all of this free time during the week, or some free time during the week, and I just didn't – I couldn't justify then going to work all weekends. And for me also, it was an accumulative thing that I'd always worked antisocial shifts, so I don't regret any of the shows that I've done or the jobs that I've done and I'm immensely grateful for all of them, but they were breakfast shows, late night shows, weekend breakfast shows, weekend late night shows [laughs], travel shows, and then a show on a Sunday, and then a show on a Saturday. And honest to God, I got to 40 with two small children, you know, a very busy working partner and I just thought, I can't commit to another ten years of weekend working as well. You know, so for me it just didn't work. And there was no other solution to that apart from me changing what I did. So I'm also not saying that I was ever forced into a hole, it just – for our family, for my family, it just wasn't a viable proposition anymore. And I hugely admire all of the parents who stick with it, and also I'm so conscious of the fact that for many people the financial imperative does not allow them to make a change, and I was very lucky that I could make a change. And really, you know, I think as one very nice BBC boss said at the time, you know, "You are moving out of the fast lane and as long as you're aware that that's what you're doing, that's what's going to happen," and so, I did. And lots of people never wanted to be in the fast lane anyway or, you know, still wanted to get there. You know, those are individual choices, so I hope in not judging other people's, that nobody would judge mine. But also, just hand-on-heart, I was knackered, you know, I was old. They write that, you know, primigravida thing at the top of your notes, you know, when you're a first-time old mum, and I was just tired, really, really, really properly zonked, so I needed to just step back and do things differently.

Q: [1:24:38] Maybe we haven't time to go into it, but I'll just note that you had made an interesting documentary on this structural question around motherhood and the choices that are forced at this time, in The Great Egg Freeze, something you did fairly recently.

A: [1:24:55] Yes.

Q: [1:24:58] But I was – yeah, I was thinking this is – it's all part of the same discussion, isn't it?

A: [1:25:02] Oh gosh, totally and actually, so I've made a series of documentaries for Radio 4 about modern parenting issues with the producer Sarah Cuddon. And one of them was just about the changing face of motherhood and actually the fantastic honesty that we're now allowed to have about all of these things that we're facing. You know, from the change in our bodies to coping or not coping at work, to being able to say, "Hands up, early years childcare, can't stand it, I'm struggling." You know, all the stuff that actually our mothers couldn't say, you know, it had to be dressed up in this wonderful, "I'm a mother, it's absolutely marvellous." So we made one about that which started a ball rolling. We've done one recently about dads' experience, poor mental health after birth for dads. We're making one about shared parental leave and actually, the most impactful one was about egg freezing, which is such a new opportunity in fertility. And the focus of the documentary was just about how it's being marketed to very young women with phrases like, "take control of your own destiny." So the sheer notion that you can freeze your eggs and somehow you will be able to decide when motherhood happens for you, is slightly troubling. The statistics do not back that up. It is not a guaranteed success rate and it's also – it's

covered in all kinds of difficulties I think, because it's being offered by quite a few of the tech giants as part of their private healthcare package and although it may seem very appealing in your 20s and that may seem the act of a kind employer, it's also undoubtedly true that what they're saying is, "give your best years to us," and somehow we give you this opportunity. You'll be able to leave when you're 35 or 45 and you'll still be able to have a family. That may not happen even if you meet the right person and even if you decide it's the right time to leave a job, you know, the live births that actually come out of egg freezing are – the statistics are poor, really, really, poor. So yeah, we made a one-hour special for the World Service and a half-an-hour documentary for Radio 4. I think both of us were quite surprised by the whole thing and, you know, I don't condemn any women who does it all. I would have done it myself; I absolutely would have done it myself because I got to 30 and thought, yikes, you know, will this ever happen for me? And it actually came out of – the documentary came out of me – I was in Manhattan at the time and never have I felt more single [laughs] and kind of yikes about my future, and I remember seeing an advert on the subway, and those were the words, that was the advert, you know, "take control of your fertility destiny," and I thought yes, you know, I'll be able to do this. And then, I looked into it and – you know, with that kind of journalistic mind and looked at the statistics and the outcomes and just thought, that's not taking control at all. You know, that's placing a bet on, you know, a horse that might not even make it out of the yard. That's crazy. But it's incredibly appealing and for some women it's worked out and it's blissful. But we met people in the documentary for whom it's not worked out and to say that they are riddled with regret is a huge – I mean, you know, that's not even exaggerating it, they are bereft at the choices that they made, so yeah. Difficult, a really difficult one.

Q: [1:28:52] Well, let's then go back to your return to work. The little bit of – well, it wasn't little actually. I have that you were back at Saturday Live for quite a long time.

A: [1:29:03] What, after my daughter?

Q: [1:29:06] After your son.

A: [1:29:08] Yes, so I went back to Saturday Live when Hecky was about nine months old – my son's called Hector – and probably – yeah, well I stayed until I had my daughter two-and-a-half years later, yep. Does that add up [laughs]? It should do.

Q: [1:29:25] Well, I have it actually you won Best UK Speech Programme at the Sony Awards –

A: [1:29:30] Yes.

Q: [1:29:30] I'd like to mention, in 2008.

A: [1:29:33] So we won the Sony when I was pregnant with Honor, so that was 2008, and then I went back to Saturday Live for nearly two years and then I left when she was two, yeah. So I suppose it's four years in all, yeah.

Q: [1:29:47] And so you've said that you were following John Peel's Home Truths in some ways. How was that? You know, it was different but similar, similar in a way.

A: [1:29:59] Yeah, so it was quite – it was slightly – it seemed like a tall order at the start because Home Truths had just done something unique for Radio 4 where it had brought this wonderful domestic life into a programme in a really appealing, clever, warm-hearted way. And John Peel, for him it was such a change from what we knew and loved him for, but he was just brilliant, I mean, absolutely brilliant at it. So, you know, we always said that we weren't trying to fill his shoes and Mark Damazer was absolutely right when he axed the programme, axed Home Truths, because nobody could carry on doing it. It was never going – you were always going to turn on the radio and miss John Peel, so that just wasn't going to work. So he just asked us, Mark Damazer asked us to do something in the same kind of arena but do it very differently and that just seemed to make no sense 'cause it was kind of like what does that even mean? You know, do we do the same kind of stories but, you know, faster [laughs]? You know, what is it? So we really started from scratch and we had lots of different iterations on paper before we finally went to air. Maria Williams was the editor, she came from Woman's Hour and Radio 1 documentaries before that, and she was just superb. So she had no kind of echo in her head of what the programme should be, and I think we did eventually pull it off. I think we had a rocky start, but we just decided that we wanted to do something that was entertaining, but also really carried the week's news with it. So our big interview was always something relevant to the week's news but with somebody unconnected to the story. So for example, there was a very, very tragic death of a mum who had been wrongly accused of killing her two sons, and it had turned out actually that the expert witness who had been instrumental in gaining that

conviction had been subsequently rather discredited for that particular statement that he'd made and actually, her sons had died of natural causes. But she had been imprisoned, she had been accused of these terrible crimes and eventually she had basically drunk herself to death. It was a terrible, terrible story and on Saturday Live we looked at miscarriages of justice and we talked to someone who had been the victim of a miscarriage of justice. He had been in prison for 15 years for a crime he hadn't committed, but eventually he'd been exonerated, so we did a long form interview with him just about what that does to a life. So that's what – is probably the best example of what we tried to do. Whatever it was that had happened, we'd just try and shed some light on it with somebody else who'd had a similar experience. And then in around that, 'cause obviously quite often that could be quite hard stuff, we just did lots of wonderful radio frippery really. So we had sound sculptures where, you know, people would tell us about their favourite sounds, and we'd go and make an arty kind of sound piece about it. JP Devlin was one of the producers on the show, we'd send him off to service stations just to talk to people, just this long vox pop about where you're going and what you're doing, and he was brilliant at that. And then we had this fantastic feature, Inheritance Tracks, which was Maria's idea where somebody talks about a track that they've inherited from their parents and what that had meant, and then what it is that they'd leave to the next generation. Which is just the most wonderful conceit and this wonderful way of getting people to talk about their whole life, you know, in six minutes, you know, with some glorious Nina Simone or something running underneath it. So I think it ended up being a very – really, really good show. But it was a bit difficult at the beginning because the Radio 4 audience don't like new at all, so we got a lot of backlash, a lot at the beginning. And I think all of us were a bit head in our hands for the first six months, but then it came good.

Q: [1:34:23] Well, I was going to read, this is the one criticism I found –

A: [1:34:25] Oh, go for it, no go for it.

Q: [1:34:26] [Laughs] Is that alright?

A: [1:34:28] Of course [laughs].

Q: [1:34:29] I mean, I should say I love Inheritance Tracks, that's exactly the sort of thing I listen to and love –

A: [1:34:33] Yes.

Q: [1:34:35] You know, that's – I'm the right audience for that, but I didn't find many criticisms, not that I was looking for them, but I came across this.

A: [1:34:42] Oh no, they're definitely there.

Q: [1:34:43] Alastair Stewart, journalist newscaster, who called Saturday Live, "Unfunny, self-indulgent, contrived and worst of all, twee." More, "Jarvis Cocker and Matthew Parris would see Saturday and Sunday morning sorted." This was in a whole lot of people in the Daily Telegraph 2011, so it could be this is BBC-bashing in the Daily Telegraph.

A: [1:35:08] Yes.

Q: [1:35:10] But, I don't know, I thought – just to see what you would say to that. I mean, I don't know who this man is –

A: [1:35:15] So I don't – well, I mean, I don't mind that criticism at all, I mean, I think – so my absolute fear is of the twee and I really, you know – I find some things on BBC radio switch-offable because they're so twee and I think it's a really, really relevant criticism. 'cause I think sometimes when you're trying to – if you don't nail funny, it can be twee. So if you're trying too hard to make everything amusing, it can sound twee, and I think Saturday Live, you know, has been that sometimes, undoubtedly. And also, sometimes when you have a gathering of people in a studio it can absolutely work, you know, it's like the best party ever and everyone's, you know, shooting funny things at each other and responding and stuff. But then if you get it wrong, it can sound so forced and especially if you're trying to make people laugh and everyone's laughing too much, but they're not genuinely laughing, that sounds horrendous. And I think sometimes on Saturday Live that definitely, definitely happened. So we'd get this kind of random group of people in to talk about all manner of things and everyone was a bit nervous, and nothing was particularly funny, but it would just be a gruelling hour for the listener [laughs]. So I think that's fair. But when it worked, I think it worked really well.

Q: [1:36:48] Well, I'm quite impressed that you take that [laughs].

A: [1:36:52] Oh no, I think that's fine, people have said worse things about me, honestly, a lot.

Q: [1:36:56] Well, I was thinking there was a certain sort of, I don't know if there's a gender element there of Jarvis Cocker and Matthew Parris, but anyway, that's me putting words into –

A: [1:37:02] Yes.

Q: [1:37:04] It's not about what I think. Can I ask something more general about how radio might have been changing in relation to the launch of Four Extra, Radio 4 Extra, in 2011? And thinking about the move to fully digital broadcasting. BBC maybe trying to adjust itself to the rise of digital.

A: [1:37:31] Yeah, so I think digital – I mean, it crept up on people actually, 'cause I don't think people really realised the – how content needed to change for a digital world. So you can fully understand hardware, that seemed to be a very, very simple change to make, you know, we are literally going to start listening to things on a different piece of equipment and it might have a clarity of sound to it that we didn't have before. But I think what people struggled with, and I don't think radio's alone in this, but people struggled with understanding how listening habits would change with digital and therefore how our content needed to change. And by that I mean you suddenly had so much more time to fill, so should you just literally be filling that with more of the same in the same format? More repeats? An extended version? You know, is that what more digital stations mean? And also, how do you – radio had been very linear. You put it on in the corner of the room or the car, it tended to stay on the same station, and you had one level of interaction with it. And then along comes digital. You can flick around for a start, so you've really got to think about how you

keep somebody from just pressing a button instead of having to go [makes a noise of dial turning] to get the next station. And also, you've got this massive interaction which does change content. And I think it has really taken – I mean, I think we've changed at warp speed and we've done it very well, but it's taken a decade really to understand that you need to make audio in a different way. It's not about the platform, it's not about the tech, it really is about the content, and we're still learning what that means. I mean, just to give you an example. I remember being asked five years ago about podcasting. We used to have a slot, Podcast of the Week, when we first started on Saturday Live which we dropped because it was decided that podcasts weren't really taking off, so there was no point in doing podcasts. So that tells you everything you need to know. We didn't see it coming [laughs]. So, you know, it's like someone saw the bison coming cross the horizon and then everyone went, "No, that's a mirage, we're absolutely fine," and then it's not until you hear the thud of their feet, you know, a hundred yards in front of you that you go, "Oh, my God, the bison are here." So I think we did exactly that with podcasting and that seems mad looking back on it, because now everybody recognises that podcasting's here to stay. But people love it because the content's different. You know, it's not that they can just press download and listen, it's because there's something new in the content that is wonderful and appealing, and we had no idea of that, you know, five, six, seven years ago at all. So that is warp speed, a warp speed of change.

Q: [1:40:50] Another big change perhaps is the role of indie production companies or the rise of more and more outsourcing. What do you think about that?

A: [1:41:00] Well, so there was a – there have been lots of different stages of that, I mean, you know, the BBC's gone from being totally BBC to having to have 25 percent of its content made by indies. Certainly in radio, I think that brought some fresh sounds. I mean, you know, that – Richard Kilgarriff and I all those years ago making The Ad Break would never have got that through a BBC department, that wouldn't – you know, that only happened 'cause it was, you know, a tiny little independent company in inverted commas doing it. I think the indie sector, you know, brought wonderful things to the BBC, but then it seemed to get a little bit hard to handle. I mean, at Radio 4 there is now a batch system where you have to be a recognised supplier. There are only so many of those, I think because, you know, Radio 4 during its commissioning rounds would just be inundated. You know, these commissioning editors were having to read through a thousand proposals, you know, for ten slots. So, you know, the indie sector just grew and grew and grew. There wasn't enough work and commissions to justify it really, so it's gone *boof*, and I think it's slimmed down now when it's aimed at the BBC but, I mean, of course the independent sector is making some of the most fabulous audio in all kinds of different places, it doesn't need the BBC platform as much as it once did. So the next phase of the independents will be very interesting. And also that – you know, the idea that you are only a radio production company, I mean, that's just a thing of the past because you have to make digital audio and it has to have other elements to it. So you've got to understand a much, much bigger world than just radio. And, I mean, people don't really want to even say that they are a radio – we have to call it audio now [laughs], we're not radio we're audio, so yes, it's very different. I like working very much for the independent production companies as well as the BBC, and they are very different working experiences.

Q: [1:43:20] Why do you? What's the difference?

A: [1:43:23] Well, so we make a programme through Whistledown Productions called My Perfect Country for the BBC World Service which we've been doing for three years now, and it's just a different way of working. I mean, the team is very small, it's me and two other producers, and we work in a very concentrated and very quick way and, you know, it's just us really. We've got our reporters that we use, we book the studio, we've got our guests, I write the script and do the questions, the producers are absolutely fantastic, they bring in the audio, we put it all together, it's there, we cut it, we send it on. And obviously, with the BBC, you know, if I'm making something like – I mean, The Listening Project is complicated, so that's probably not the best example, but if I'm making something inhouse with the BBC, there are just many, many, many more people involved. I mean, it's just as simple as that. It doesn't feel like quite such a kind of straightforward journey really. So I enjoy working for the indies very much because I can just do what I am being paid to do without any distraction. There are fewer meetings, I can say that, there are definitely fewer meetings.

Q: [1:44:50] I'd like to now ask you about The Listening Project. A quite, I think, mould-breaking, ground-breaking series and I'd like to hear lots about it, you know, types of content, format, but maybe beginning with how it came about, who commissioned it, funding, a sort of back story first.

A: [1:45:13] Sure, yep. So The Listening Project came to the BBC through Gwyneth Williams who was the English language commissioning editor at the BBC World Service before she became the controller at Radio 4. And she had been a big fan of Story Corps in the United States which is

the most remarkable project set up by radio genius Dave Isay, where he just hit upon this notion of handing over the microphone to two people without an interrogator or a journalist or a producer guiding the conversation, and just allowing people to talk about whatever they want to talk about with each other. So Story Corps in America became huge under his direction and I think at the last count they have 70,000 conversations stored in the Library of Congress, so they're a massive thing. They've been going for about, God, nearly 20 years now. And Gwyneth had heard some Story Corps and wanted to bring it to Radio 4, so she asked Tony Phillips who was the commissioning editor at Radio 4 at the time, to take it on. And Tony Phillips was an enormous fan of Dave Isay and of Story Corps, so he moulded The Listening Project on that, with permission from Story Corps, and brought it to Radio 4. So although we are a facsimile of Story Corps, we have always been a little bit different because we're British and we talk in a different way. Story Corps is very much about love and warmth, very, very much about that. You know, quite frequently a conversation will be – I mean, their tagline is "listening is an act of love," and that's where their conversations try and go. For the British Library who are our partners with The Listening Project, we wanted to create an archive of modern times. So ours is perhaps a more wide-ranging project in terms of who comes in and what they talk about. But, having said that, we are also I think, as far as I know, the BBC's only blank sheet of paper that is handed over to the listeners, they are genuinely allowed to talk about what they want to talk about, our producers help them make that happen but don't intervene in the conversation, and the aim was always to capture where we are. So modern Britain, who we are, what we think is important told in our own words without somebody like me pushing and prodding around. So I hope it has become a tiny little, tiny little mainstay of the BBC for exactly that reason that, you know, we are a public service broadcaster and somewhere in the enormous array of

content that we make, there has to be a tiny place which just comes from the people who pay. So it's just about them. And we've been going now for eight years, we have over 2,000 conversations in the British Library and every single one of those conversations is interesting to somebody and is a little winner of a chat to somebody, and it's just a remarkable thing. It's a remarkable thing to work on actually, really wonderful. I mean, the ins and outs of it are quite interesting as well, because – so it's got all kinds of different heads, it's like something out of a Greek myth. So we are funded by Radio 4, but also by the regions so we include Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. We invite local radio stations onboard so that's part-funding too. The British Library is our ultimate partner because that's where the sound archive is, and we also have these programmes that I make for Radio 4 with the Radio 4 documentary features department. So we are a hybrid of so many different things within the BBC, which again is very rare actually, the BBC can silo itself a little bit. And out of all of that comes just so much content. So the conversations are played out on local radio, some local radio stations use them for phone-ins, you know, to broaden out a topic, other local radio stations will invite the people who've participated in for a longer conversation. There are whole themed programmes about, you know, different stuff that we've covered. At Radio 4 we have a Sunday afternoon omnibus, three separate conversations go out during the week. Quite a number of specials. We did a special around Brexit, we've done specials all around the country in different areas. And ultimately, because the archive is public as well at the British Library, we know that a lot of the content then goes on to be used in academia, it's being used in schools. We know of quite a few projects – and in fact, we were contacted by a social worker the other day who said that she was using some of the conversations with vulnerable groups that she works with to just show them how you can talk better about what life throws at you, and expect to be listened to.

So it's just got impact in all kinds of different places which is again, I think, just a really remarkable concept. 'cause it sounds so simple, it sounds like it doesn't do much, but it does lots, lots and lots.

Q: [1:51:12] That's such a nice introduction. I want to go back to the Story Corps –

A: [1:51:15] Yeah.

Q: [1:51:17] – origin because I'm interested, very interested in the comparing – the similarities and differences that you touched on. I've heard some oral historians and one particular person in the States, saying that Story Corps had a slightly lite element, you know, l-i-t-e perhaps, in contrast to oral history. Now, I don't know how to measure that, but I do know that Story Corps has – it's a non-profit organisation so it maybe has a slightly different kind of basis to the BBC and the British Library. I don't know what you think about that and whether you think The Listening Project avoids that potential critique?

A: [1:52:13] Yeah. So I understand, you know, what whoever said that is trying to say about Story Corps. I mean, personally I don't think either Story Corps or The Listening Project are lite versions of oral history, just because I find it a bit patronising, the notion that oral history if it's not governed by something or someone with an expert view or a research remit, it can't be of interest. We've had exactly the same criticism levelled at us, so quite a few people working in oral history have said, "No, you can't call it oral history," and we've said, [laughs], "Well, we're going to," [laughs] because, you know, to us, that is what we are. I mean, I slightly understand that we – if we don't have very set

parameters it's hard to categorise us within the kind of industry of oral history, but I don't think that precludes us from working our way in. And I always think for future generations, and a huge part of The Listening Project is about future generations, it's not about us now. And it's not about whether we create great radio content, you know, for Sunday afternoon. It's about 200 years down the line, where people will be able to just press a button and hear Brian and Shirley talk about their marriage. Will Brian and Shirley tell you anything about where they live or, you know, about cultural differences, or anything about world events? No, they probably won't, but inherent in their 45-minute conversation they will tell you about the stresses and strains that people lived under, you know, in this point in time, about what we sounded like, about what alcoholism can do to a family. They will tell you all kinds of things that might be important to better understand. And surely, the whole study of history is to better understand what went before. So I think we could split hairs over that and, you know, who cares? One person's lite is another person's completely fascinating heft, so I don't want to be told what to be interested in and which bit of someone's life is more important than another. I want them to tell me because it's their life and I don't think it's lite at all, at all.

Q: [1:54:57] However there maybe is a difference in the contract, in that if Story Corps is doing it as an independent non-profit, whereas you're partnered with the British Library. I mean, maybe just tell me about how that agreement was set up. You know, I know Rob Perks is the curator of oral history there, was it with him that it was negotiated? What conversations were had?

A: [1:55:21] So, yes, I mean, it was negotiated with Rob Perks and Roly Keating who was recently in situ as head of the British Library. The

exact remit is quite interesting because, you know, we are very evenly double-handed, and I don't know whether Story Corps is even-handed with the Library of Congress. I mean, that's their partnership. I don't know how much say the Library of Congress has about what it is that Story Corps provides. But we do have that relationship with the British Library. So sometimes the British Library will say to us, "The bits that we feel are missing from the Project are hearing from very rich people, hearing from the new immigrant communities in this country," you know, maybe they'll say, "We haven't heard an awful lot from Sunderland, but we have heard a lot from Newcastle." So they will give us a direction, but the direction is much more about covering all bases, so they're not saying that we only want to hear rich people talking about being rich, they're literally saying, you know, we don't seem to have very many people from this type of background talking about whatever it is that they want to talk about. So I think we've always been very clear that they can't editorialise on us in the same way that we're not telling them, you know, what to do with the archive. I mean, how they collate it is entirely up to them and I suppose if they – I mean, their collation I think is brilliant and extraordinary and incredibly detailed, so you can go in to find different dialects or demographics or age groups or whatever. I mean, it's up to them, if they wanted to stop doing it by age or demographic they could, we wouldn't have a say in that. So, you know, there's an importance to each part, definitely, definitely. And I suppose – I don't know, it's a very interesting question about the Library of Congress actually, because I don't even know what their access is, but it's incredibly important to the British Library that this is a public access archive, it's not just going into a place, you know, only to be looked at by people who, I don't know, specifically ask for it or have some kind of a qualification. I mean, anyone can go online and find the chats.

Q: [1:57:42] And did you go and talk to David Isay? How much direct relationship did you have?

A: [1:57:49] So no, Tony Phillips did all of the initial instigation and overseeing of it, and I met Dave when he came over to kind of introduce himself and his team, 'cause we did quite a lot of training work with his team for the producers who were first on The Listening Project, so I met him then. But otherwise, no, I mean, it's all credit to Gwyneth and to Tony for getting it all set up, yep. And actually, it's interesting that there was so much collaboration because although I think we make it sound very simple in what we present to the listener, you know, it's two people sitting down having a conversation, and I mean, that is an easy thing to record but also quite difficult. You really have to know that both parties want to do it, you can't have someone bringing a more vulnerable person in, you know, with a desire to, I don't know, flesh out some dreadful family argument or, you know, reveal a secret or something like that. That's not what we do. So the producers had to learn a lot from Story Corps producers about how to just make this a really lovely environment in order to get this remarkable conversation that sounds so very simple in the end.

Q: [1:59:08] Could you describe how it works physically to enable this?

A: [1:59:12] Yes, sure. So a Listening Project conversation, the easiest way to describe is to imagine that you're the person wanting to do the chat. So perhaps you sit at home and you hear one going out on local radio or Radio 4 and you think, oh, I've always wanted to talk to my cousin Michael about the way that we were both brought up, you know, about things that happened in our family, the career choices we've made – whatever it is. So then you would get in touch with the

producer through our website probably and say, "This is who I am, this is who I want to talk to, can I record a conversation?" The producer then gets in touch with both you and the other participant, very important, and makes sure that you've got enough to say because we don't want to waste BBC money and everybody's time unless there is a – you know, something there. And then the producer will set up the time and the place and our producers rove all over the place with their microphones, they can do conversations in situ or people go into a local radio station or they come to Broadcasting House, or they go into our booth. We've got a little travelling booth that goes round the country. They then sit down, have a conversation that can be anything from half-an-hour to an hour. Some producers really go the distance, I think the longest is 90 minutes, that was recorded in the booth, I think on quite a hot day as well [laughs]. And the producer just makes sure that both parties are really comfortable with everything that's being said. And occasionally, you know, if the conversation kind of dries up a bit or if the producer can hear that something has been a little bit passed over that maybe needs to be returned to, they'll give a gentle prod, but quite often, they don't intervene at all. And then after that conversation has been recorded they'll do a little bit of editing just to make it, you know, tidy and then it comes to us at Radio 4. The producers can send the whole thing to us or just the cut-down version they think we might want to play out. I then write a script around it and put in all the bits and pieces that you need to know. That's what creates our Radio 4 programme, and then the local radio station will also have access to that conversation, and then the full conversation goes into the British Library. So it's quite a time-consuming process and, you know, it passes through a lot of places. And obviously, we don't play out excerpts from every conversation, we don't have enough time and not every conversation will even be played out on local radio. And we've got loads that we could play out, you know, we could keep

going from here to eternity already. I think we've got, you know, a good hundred or so just waiting on producers' desks at the moment, and lots that we've never played anything from, so yeah. It's a big old thing actually, it is a big old thing.

Q: [2:02:20] Do you have to manage expectations in that sense? I mean, are there people who want to take part who at that very early level you have to say, "I don't think there's a conversation in this."

A: [2:02:32] Yeah, yes.

Q: [2:02:34] What proportion [both talking at once] –

A: [2:02:36] So I think it really depends on lots of things, it depends sometimes on the time of year. You know, if we've done a special at Radio 4 and we've put a call-out for people to get involved and we have a sudden rush, you know, that might not be viable that – you know, we literally might not have the production to do all of that. I mean, sometimes the conversations just don't – it's not that they don't merit it, that's slightly too harsh a term, I mean, it might just be that we've already had a hundred conversations, you know, discussing palliative care. I mean, that does come up quite a lot, you know, we can't always just do, "let's look back on a life" stories. But I think we do try very hard to include as many people as is humanly possible. Some people get it – won't ultimately end up having a Listening Project conversation because they're looking for it to do something that it can't do. I mean, it can't resolve a problem, it's not a therapy session, and it can't be only one person seeking to get answers. It's about the balance, it's about proper talking and listening. So our producers are

very canny, and they can work out if a conversation's just not going to be suitable for that reason. And do you know what, in all of those thousands of conversations, so that's probably nearly 5,000 people who've passed through our doors already, there has only – nobody has ever left a conversation, no-one's ever walked out and said, "This is too much," or whatever. And only one person has asked for the conversation to then be removed from the archive because they weren't happy with it. So whatever it is that we're doing, and the producers are doing, they're getting it right, you know, they're bringing people into the Project who understand what it is and who kind of deserve a place in it. And in fact, the one that was removed was quite interesting because it was a lovely conversation between friends and one of them asked for it to be removed because they'd subsequently had an argument and she was really pissed off, she didn't want a lovely warm-hearted chat [laughs] with her mate to be in the British Archive because she'd subsequently decided that she wasn't a very nice person [laughs]. And actually, you really want to go back to them now, you know, five years later and go, "Have you made up? Do you want a conversation about that?" [Laughs] But I thought it was quite a kind of realistic – I sympathised, I kind of thought, yeah, I mean, if I'd really fallen out with somebody I wouldn't want to know that there was us being all pally and lovely somewhere for future generations to listen to. But that is the only one.

Q: [2:05:31] Could you give us some more examples of conversations that you can remember or that you liked? Just one clarification, you said it's very light-touch production, you know, or no intervention if possible. Is the producer actually in the same room?

A: [2:05:45] Yes. So the producer's in the same room. I mean, apart from very occasionally if they'd be in a studio at Broadcasting House where there's a dividing glass, that's slightly kind of splitting hairs. But yeah, the producer's always with the people, yeah.

Q: [2:06:02] And you aren't ever?

A: [2:06:03] No, no, I'm not, I'm not. And I would really hate people to think that I was. And actually, when I first started on the Project, there was a suggestion initially that we wouldn't mention the producer's name. So I would write a programme that went, you know, Beryl and Graham came in and, you know, we'd hear the chat and then I'd pick up at the end and just say, "Oh, Beryl and Graham," and then move on to the next one. And actually, I thought it was incredibly – 'cause that's making out that it's me doing all the work, I did think it's incredibly important to credit the producers, and also it has worked really well because of course the producers need the credit, it is their work. And also, it's kind of inherent in the Project that we recognise all of the collaboration. So it should never sound like it's just Radio 4's project 'cause it's not, you know, it belongs to all of these local radio stations, nations, and regions as well. So no, I would hate people to think that I was there doing all the work. I'd be exhausted if I was [laughs]. That would be a lot of chat to listen to, yeah.

Q: [2:07:11] So now go back to examples, if you can think of some.

A: [2:07:18] God, I mean, how many do you want? There are so many conversations that I love from the Project and I can honestly say as well that I am a better person for having listened to so many of the

conversations, 'cause there ain't anything as wise as folk. I mean, some of the wisdom that comes out of people, and it's so beautiful because it's just in passing, so you're not buying a self-help – you know, you haven't sat down and gone, I'm going to do half-an-hour of positive thinking, you know, or try and solve this issue. It's just the most wonderful, this is what I did, and this is what happened. Lots of them really, really, really stay in my mind. There was a really lovely conversation between two women recorded in the West Midlands where they talk about how society – one of them has children, had four children, and the other one never had children. And they talk about how society has treated them differently as a mother and as a non-mother. And it's so beautiful, and it makes you realise how far we've come because actually for one of the women I think that level of prejudice has been really affecting. You know, the idea that if you haven't had children somehow your life hasn't worked out, which is just a terrible and awful way to think. So it tells you about prejudice, but also it tells you about warmth of friendship, it tell you about how you don't always need to be exactly the same as everybody else in order to get on. It's also really funny about their lack of sex education because they talk [laughs] – they talk about their early sexual experiences and, I mean, it's just hilarious, absolutely hilarious. One of them talks about first realising that, you know, where babies came from and she just, you know, decided that if that had to happen there was absolutely no way. She puts it in really brilliantly, slightly crude terms that I won't repeat. So I really enjoyed that conversation, I loved it for the notion, really, really loved it for the notion that we've come a long way since then and I really hope that we have. The conversations about kids, we've had a lot of conversations between parents or parents and their children about, you know, terrible things. About losing children. Those have been really affecting. There was a remarkable one from Scotland between a husband and wife who had

lost their child really young, I think he was only five or six, and he says, "We've come to recognise that we're still the same trees in the forest, but we've lost some bark from the tree." Which, I mean, you just couldn't – nobody can put it better. And the wonderful thing I think that the Project does is that people only come to it when they're really ready to talk, so they do have some kind of wisdom to impart, and they were talking about that loss, I mean, a good five or six years down the line. So they'd really thought about it, it had really sunk in, they weren't in shock or trauma. So things like that, I think just make you realise how everyone is getting through life, and there are many, many ways to get through it, and you'll learn a little bit from somebody else's experience. There's an all-time brilliant one between Beryl and Graham who are grandmother and grandson, which was recorded in Radio Humberside which is just [laughs] about how, you know, how times have changed, and Beryl's quite a character. And she talks about how she fell in love and I think her husband came to pick her up in a three-wheeled – do you remember those three-wheeled Robin Reliant cars? I mean, who makes a three-wheeled car? And she talks about trying to make out in a three-wheeled car [laughs], and it's just rocking all over the place. And of course her grandson is a little bit like, oh my goodness. But it's so wonderful and just charming. I mean, I could just go on forever. There have been so many. So, so many. And I would never be able to pick a favourite either, so please don't ask me to.

Q: [2:11:37] Well, I was going to ask you, do you think they've changed over time?

A: [2:11:41] Yes, definitely. So when we first started it was incredibly difficult to explain to people what we were trying to do, so quite a few of the conversations really early days were – are more formal than now

because as soon as people started to hear what it was we were expecting, which is actually quite low-level chat, it doesn't – you know, it doesn't have to be about something enormous, and it doesn't have to sound like lots of other things sound on the radio. It's conversation, real, proper, normal conversation. So it did take a while for people to kind of calm down and do it like that, and then as soon as they did and other people heard it, you know, we could carry on. So they've definitely changed. And now, and the producers say this all the time, that, you know, they don't have to explain to people what The Listening Project is, you know, people come to us 'cause they've heard it and they can hear themselves doing it. So there's a much more natural kind of pace of speech and confidence of speech, so it is quite different now, yeah.

Q: [2:12:52] What about in terms of topics, in the sense that you've suggested this is a kind of first draft of history project as well as about personal experience. Could you track the changing state of the nation or the state of a region or, you know, the world that...?

A: [2:13:12] Gosh, good question. So I suppose in time you will be able to, yes. I mean, if you take something like, if you took the topic of sexuality then you would be able to find conversations that we recorded, you know, nearly ten years ago that would tell a different story to that being told now. So I'm thinking, we've got quite a lot of stories that came in right at the beginning about people's experiences of coming out which, I mean, it's hard to kind of conceive this, but even ten years ago there was a different attitude to coming out than there is now. And there was – you know, a lot of people find it much easier to be open about their sexuality now, so the whole telling of a coming out story is different. But we have conversations that are specifically about

that. Do you remember the time when I told you, Mum? And the entire conversation will be about that, and I'm sure, you know, that if we're still going in another 20 years' time that might sound quite old-fashioned, that there was a notion that the coming out story was, you know, the thing. We've definitely had conversations more recently where it's almost by-the-by. Oh, you know, when I told you – and then they move on to something else, it's no longer the most important thing. So I hope that in that sense it tells a kind of timeline of history, definitely.

Q: [2:14:42] Well, you mentioned a special on Brexit and I was thinking about that in relation to tracking mood, public opinion, sense of belonging.

A: [2:14:54] Yes.

Q: [2:14:56] Could you say something about that particular topic, how people talked about things?

A: [2:14:59] So Brexit has been so interesting because we didn't want to get too stuck on Brexit because there was definitely a time when everybody who came into the booth or a local radio studio would end up referencing Brexit. And, I mean, that's all well and good because that's what's been in our national conversation, but equally there are other projects that are doing that, solely dedicated to Brexit. So we did some Brexit specials. We thought okay, well, we'll drill down on this enormous state of the nation stuff and those were really revealing, because they are people who know each other and love each other, that's the remit of the project, you know, inevitably we did find those

people who had voted differently or had an intention to vote differently within their family, within their relationship, within their community. We did it just before the Referendum and returned and revisited the subject afterwards, and just the language was really fascinating. Because the level of debate became so divisive and confrontational, whenever you heard it being talked about in other parts of the media, you know, it was high-pitched and it was harsh, and it was angry. But in the Project, we had a different way of talking about it, and nobody had a full-on barney, that's not what we were trying to do. We were allowing people to talk about that kind of wider impact of everything happening around them. So the conversations were really brilliant, and I really remember one of them where two friends who were in Lincolnshire, they were talking about just the influx of new communities into their town and particularly Eastern European. And one of them said, you know, "I simply don't like walking past the local coffee shop and there's a group of men who are sitting there and they look at me in a different way, and it's just a different way to how I'm used to being looked at." And her friend basically says, "Yeah, I mean, I totally understand what you mean by that," and then they carry on talking. And I thought well, if somebody had been on a phone-in and said that, your immediate response is to challenge that as being a racist thing to say, as picking out people for being different, or for – you could use that to back-up an argument that is racist. You know, there's a whole lot of stuff involved in that sentence. But because they were friends and deeply cared about each other, they allowed each other to have that sentiment. I mean, it's a sentiment that lots of people in the country did have, and it was just really lovely, and I don't mean that in a – you know, I'm endorsing what she said in any way at all, but it was really lovely to just hear somebody be able to say it without it immediately going [makes explosion noise] into something else. Because everything else has – you know, the fireworks

have been lit. So the Project's important sometimes for exactly that reason, just to allow a kind of low-level of conversation that's just as telling and revealing but, you know, maybe just doesn't have the kind of dramatic overtones.

Q: [2:18:45] I'm thinking about the demography of people who come on it and just as an example, would you say there were more Remainers or more Leavers?

A: [2:18:54] Oh, my goodness [laughs]. So, as you can imagine when we did our Brexit specials we really had to consider that very carefully, so that was a very, very evenly balanced series of programmes that we did. I mean, in the Project in general, I've got no idea whether we'd ever be able to ascertain that. I mean, in some ways we're self-selecting because people ask to be in the project, and you can look at the BBC's demographic and that would be the demographic that follows through into the Project. So whoever it is who's listening to local radio or listening to Radio 4, it's from those people that the majority of the conversations will come. But I don't really want to make any judgments, you know, about what that demographic is because it's very different in different parts of the country. So we've got a different demographic, you know, up at Radio Humberside than we would do down in Radio Cambridgeshire or, you know, Devon and Cornwall. So, yep, it is what it is.

Q: [2:20:03] Well, that takes me to a general point about your aim to capture the nation in conversation. How far is this possible [laughs], I mean, it's a very complex exercise that, I guess. But I'm thinking about what The Listening Project might say or not be able to say about

Britishness or about Englishness or about United Kingdom-ness, about national identity.

A: [2:20:31] So I think we try very hard to cover all bases, but I don't think we would be arrogant enough to say that we've succeeded, at all. And actually, we had quite an interesting breakdown of our demographic about six months ago when we were talking about, you know, how the Project might begin to change or revitalise itself or all kinds of things, and actually we pretty much nail the country in terms of religion and ethnicity. We're not quite nailing it in terms of wealth. I mean, interestingly we don't have as many people right up at the top as we might do down at the bottom. But we are a good representation of culture and ethnicity, definitely. And religion mostly. So I'm saying that we just reflect the statistics, you know, seven percent of the population. We reflect gender very well, and we have definitely reached lots of different parts of the country, we may not have reflected all of the different communities in different parts of the country. I mean, we have been all over so when we do our specials we like to say that we go beyond Dimbleby, so we always try and go to [laughs] – we go beyond a place that a Dimbleby might ever have visited before. So that does mean all of the outer reaches of all of our great nations, but I'm not sure that we would ever be able to say that we then meet everybody within those communities, so – but we do try, but at the same time it's not number one in our remit. So we're not saying you will be able to come to The Listening Project and find a representation of every single type of person from every single type of background. And our collation also has to be in terms of what people are going to find interesting in the subject matter. So if you go to our website, you know, we don't have a section that says Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jewish. We just have religion because we've also got loss, family life, grief, war, so we've done it differently. So we've done it

about what people are feeling, what they're going through, rather than exactly where they're from and what their identity is.

Q: [2:23:03] I'm thinking this is a lot in common with projects like the Mass Observation Project that in a way was also about mood and subjectivity, and never nicely fit into a social scientific model of, you know, either market research or social science survey. I wondered if you had any sense of that project or also, of The BBC Domesday Project or Video Nation?

A: [2:23:32] So I'm totally aware of all of those things and actually we're a little bit of all of those and we owe a little bit of ourselves to all of those projects. So, I mean, the bits that we have in common are quite obvious because the Mass Observation, that's so inherent in what we do because it's the same kind of gloriously democratic idea of experience, isn't it? So it's about everything that's going on, you know, it's not – it hasn't been delivered on a very kind of small series of remits and expectations, so we're totally similar in that regard. And I suppose, I don't know, I think every large oral collation, if you don't want to call it oral history, is going to share all of those things because we are talking and that's a very – you know, that's a wonderfully wafty, difficult to control thing. That's the beauty of it, isn't it? So yeah, we are definitely all of those things, and something will come along after The Listening Project that'll be like The Listening Project. I can't think that you could ever do an oral archive that differently actually if you are just wanting people to talk about themselves.

Q: [2:25:00] Was there any direct relationship or looking back at the Video Nation or The Domesday Project as BBC projects?

A: [2:25:08] Yes. So I think there probably was. I mean, I wouldn't have been involved in those meetings, but I'm pretty sure that we needed to be suitably different. So our points of difference are the editorial clean sheet, you know, where we genuinely have said whatever, as long as we think it's interesting, you think it's interesting, you can go for it. And also because – you know, in as much as the British Library has asked us to make sure that all bases are covered, the main selling point, and I'm not sure – you know, I've never looked at the specific remit of Video Nation or The Domesday Project but I'm pretty sure that they set out to make sure that certain boxes were ticked and places were covered, and demographics focussed on. And although the British Library asks us to make sure that we haven't really missed out, that's not where we start from. That's the end result, but where we start from – I mean, just to give you an idea, this will probably make it easier to explain. The first couple of programmes that we did at Radio 4 contained conversations between a mother and son about his heart condition, Beryl and Graham were in one of the first programmes talking about love in a three-wheeler, I think we had a conversation between a mum and her daughter talking about the mother's cancer diagnosis, and we had a beautiful one between a Sikh husband and wife talking about the success of an arranged marriage. Boom. I mean, you know, that's just everything. And also, lots of things weren't covered, so it's so random, you know, I think that is the difference really.

Q: [2:27:00] Well, another comparison could be to reality television, Big Brother onwards, and thinking about the BBC's particular remit to try and represent the nation or responsibilities that commercial TVs don't have and how it's had to position itself in relation to – I mean, I'm thinking particularly Big Brother having come from Channel 4 as inaugurating this new form of supposedly democratic kind of open forms of presentation. I don't know if you have a sense of that.

A: [2:27:37] Well, it's funny, we had a press launch at the British Library when The Listening Project started, and we were trying to explain what it was, and we didn't have any conversations for people to listen to. So I'm not sure that we really did a very good job of explaining what it was because one of the first questions was from a journalist who funnily enough worked for News International, who said, "Oh, so would you consider tapping people's phones to listen to conversations that way?" [Laughs] And, you know, all of us from Radio 4 were just like, "No. You've really not got it at all," [laughs]. 'cause it's not – it's never there to trip people up, I mean, that's the difference, isn't it? I mean, reality TV no matter how you might try and sell it, it's about waiting for someone to do something stupid or salacious or fall out or, you know, make a fool of themselves. I mean, it's about the bad, isn't it, that's what you're watching for. And The Listening Project is completely the opposite. It's about what comes good in life, it's about what you learn from life and getting through it. It's not an opportunity to kind of pick on people or expose people at all, it's just – it's the complete flipside of reality TV, I think. And we've never had a salacious revelation 'cause it's not – that's not why people are there. They might talk about the time when something was revealed or, you know, a trauma or a drama or a scandal happened, but they're talking about it from a distance and they're talking about something that's been resolved. We're not trying to capture a moment of distress, ever, ever, ever. And I'm pretty sure that all of our producers would stop a conversation if that happened 'cause that's something for a different programme, that's not for us.

Q: [2:29:42] Well, that leads perfectly to my next topic which is exactly on this sense of what you call about the good. This media theorist Kay

Richardson who I found had written an interesting piece on The Listening Project who talked about it as "caring public talk".

A: [2:30:05] Ooh, caring public talk, yeah, okay.

Q: [2:30:07] And I thought that was fascinating and particularly in contrast to the belligerent trend of public broadcasting. And you actually have touched on this a lot, the tension but also the rising aggression – this is not only within the BBC or perhaps not even primarily in the BBC – but how this is maybe a less usual way of doing public broadcasting to promote good and care and resolution, or getting through. So I was thinking about that and yes, what you thought about that phrase maybe, and about the idea of care.

A: [2:30:50] Yes, I think care – so care is integral, is a small way of putting it, care is absolutely at the heart of the Project. So when we first started training the producers, we used this, you know, the well-worn expression "from cradle to grave" as to how they needed to treat the participants of The Listening Project. So from the very first moment you get in touch with the Project, you have to be taken care of by the BBC to the moment at which you leave the Project with a copy of your conversation. So all of it has to be about care. So you can't let somebody vulnerable in, you can't make someone talk about something they don't want to talk about, and you have to make sure that it's a really positive and warm experience for the participants. And that's not to say – so that by no means dulls the Project. So that can make it sound like it's incredibly kind of cuddly and you can only talk about nice things, and that's not what we're saying at all. But we just have to make sure – 'cause we're asking people to talk about their really personal experiences of life, and often those are bad

experiences and we have to make sure all the way through that it's a worthwhile thing for them to do, to make the personal very public. Because it could go really badly wrong for people. And it never has, and I hope it never will do, but that's down to the producers being brilliant at what they do and us just constantly explaining what it will mean to be in the Project. And that you can end up, you know, having a bit of your life broadcast to millions of people, and lots of people will hear it who don't know you, but lots of people who know you will hear it. So, you know, we never want people to feel that we expose them to something, you know, that they weren't aware was going to happen. So we are totally caring of the people in the conversations, but also that phrase "care and public talk" is – I mean, it sums it up really well because people are talking about stuff that's really, really important and, you know, the worse things that can happen to you are losing a loved one, becoming incredibly ill yourself or having drama and tragedy forced upon you in some sense. And we talk about those things all the time in the Project, and what has to come out of it is a sense of generosity from the participants that they're willing to have a conversation about any one of those things. Part of the reason for them doing that is so we can all hear, so it's public eavesdropping with permission. So it just has to – you have to have that kind of bond between the people going into the Project and the people listening at home. So there's never a horrible sense of voyeurism, there's always a sense that these people are very willing for you to hear. And, I mean, that's the secret of its success 'cause quite often you'll hear all of those things being talked about on other parts of the BBC and on radio phone-ins all over the place, and it's the drama that people are after. But we're not after the drama, you know, we are after the care, we're definitely after that.

Q: [2:34:20] What's the practical way of managing those? I mean, do you have a consent form? Do you have a...?

A: [2:34:27] Yeah, there's a massive consent form that goes along with the Project, you know, as with anyone who, you know, appears and tells their story on a BBC outlet. But I think the difference is, making people aware of the impact of publication of this. So, you know, let's say you appeared on – I'm trying to think of a good example – let's say you appeared on a 5 Live phone-in. You know, you called up a phone-in that was about the breakup of – was about divorce, and you give your story and you say, you know, it was dreadful or, you know, it turned out fine, these are the lessons that I've learnt from it, you know, bish, bash, bosh. That's one kind of connection that you've made with the BBC. You're very well aware of the fact that you're phoning in a programme [laughs], so everybody's going to be listening, you know, in the moment. You're not asked to sign a consent form or anything like that, but you know what the score is. Our worry with The Listening Project has always been that we're asking people to give much more of themselves and because it's not in the moment, I phoned a phone-in show, they're not going to realise quite how big this impact could be. So we could play your conversation out in a year's time, how would you feel about that? You're going in the British Library for evermore, how will your kids feel about that? Or other people involved in your family story? So, you know, the consent form is one thing, but it's making people aware of that much, much wider thing. And it will be there forever, you know, so we're an in perpetuity project which is different to lots of other things, you know, where you can give an interview to somebody but actually, you know, they can't put it up on the website, or they can't use it five years down the line or, you know, whatever it is. You know, ours is for evermore, pretty much everything. So we really, really, really have to make people aware of that.

Q: [2:36:33] So how long – is this done with a sort of half-an-hour before the programme or how long is the time or what's the process of getting people to understand this?

A: So it really, really depends. I mean, so some conversations I know from producers are much easier than others 'cause people just immediately understand that. And they're not talking about anything, you know, hugely controversial anyway, and that's the majority of our conversations. But with conversations that are more difficult or traumatic or, you know, discussing someone who's not in the room, you know, the producers are absolutely brilliant, and they will just, you know, keep on making sure that everybody is really fully aware of it. And I know, actually I know that I mentioned the Brian and Shirley conversation which was remarkable because this is a couple who had been married, he had had a very bad head injury which had really changed his personality and unfortunately led to alcoholism and their marriage had fallen apart. Shirley had really tried to take care of Brian and it had become incredibly difficult. It was a really complicated story to tell, and our producer had been in conversation with them for about a year before they sat down and had that chat. Because there was just so much going on and there was – you know, there were difficult things that they were going to talk about. I mean, the breakdown of their marriage, they were going to sit down and talk about that with each other. So I know that with conversations like that there's an enormous amount of pre-production that goes into it, and just making sure that everybody is going to be okay with that going out. And that was one of our most remarkable conversations because at one stage in the chat, Brian says sorry to his wife and he'd never said it before. And there's this moment where he says, you know, "I'm just sorry, I'm really sorry," and there's just this huge pause, and you realise

that he's never – that's the first time he's said it. I mean, it's just – you know, it's quite breath-taking when you listen to it, but Andrew had worked so hard to make sure that they were both really fine with it. And also, there's the obvious thing in that, that if you're asking someone who's had a very serious injury, a brain injury, to be very public about that and they – you know, they might be vulnerable, so we had to make sure that he was totally fine with everything that he said. But it was a beautiful conversation in the end. But yeah, loads of care, loads of care goes into it, more than you would ever imagine, or think necessary I suspect.

Q: [2:39:17] And you've talked about that as pre-production and you've suggested, you haven't had – you've only had the one person wanting to remove it from the archive, but is there some post-production as well that is needed?

A: [2:39:29] So I think there probably is in lots of cases and I know that lots of producers keep in touch with the people who've taken part. I keep in touch with quite a few of them if we've ended up corresponding too. I've kept in touch with quite a few people who've come on our live programmes or come into the booth, just because sometimes as well what they've wanted to get from the Project is something more than the Project. So, you know, if they've written in afterwards and said, you know, could you help with this and help with that? I know that the producers and, you know, all of the team are always happy, you know, to do that and sometimes it's just nice to check-in with people and they want to check-in with us, actually. You know, some people I think have found – especially with some of those – lots of people use the Project as a kind of audio memorial to people who've died, so I think it becomes such an important thing for them to have

done if they're talking about a loved one, and it's important for them to come back to us, and it's important that we say hello and, you know, keep in touch. You know, there's a nice – lots of people come into the Project, have a chat, go away, Bob's your uncle, but for the people who want it to be a thing, you know, we're very happy for it to be a thing. A little community.

Q: [2:40:56] I'm thinking of some of the children who are absolutely scrumptious to listen to –

A: [2:41:02] Yes [laughs].

Q: [2:41:03] But, you know, them in 40 years or 50 –

A: [2:41:05] I know.

Q: [2:41:06] Have you thought that far ahead?

A: [2:41:09] So we haven't thought that far ahead, but we often have thought about revisiting, especially when people have become adults because it would just be so interesting [laughs] to hear them listening to themselves and – I mean, they are delicious, sometimes they're deliciously entertaining. But also, sometimes they're so profound and you just think, wow, you know, I can't wait to meet you as an adult. So I hope that we would have time to do exactly that. But also, we've probably got to let the embarrassing angry teenager phase pass, where people would just be like, no [laughs] I'm not going to do – no, I never did that. When they wouldn't want to listen to themselves as,

you know, cheery, cute seven-year-olds. But that's definitely worth doing and, you know, the success of Seven Up. and all of those projects has been in that, you know, look at a life over a life so, you know, if we carry on and carry on and carry on then we will have some fascinating lives to revisit, definitely.

Q: [2:42:19] Briefly on the ethical challenges and how you manage those, I was thinking about your next programme or concurrent programme Shared Experience where you are very much interviewing people with traumatic experiences. And I just wondered how you manage that, and you've talked about not wanting to stoke sensationalism in general –

A: [2:42:43] Hmm.

Q: [2:42:46] And you made a very reasonable point about, you know, you don't want your own life particularly necessarily in the public sphere. How do you manage that in that one which seemed to be more intimate?

A: [2:42:55] Yes, so Shared Experience – so some of the programmes were, but we did everything from people who had seen ghosts [laughs] to people who couldn't live with insects and vermin, to people who'd had nervous breakdowns. The one that's always stayed with me was parents who've left their children which was extraordinary, and it's such a taboo subject. You know, people who've walked away from their children and from their family life. So ethically, I mean, it always follows – so it came out of doing The Listening Project so it always followed exactly the same kind of editorial path, you know, people only came

on the programme if they really wanted to and felt it was useful to them and useful to others that they did, so we never forced anybody to come on the programme. And we were incredibly – I mean, we had to be incredibly careful about what eventually went out because in those, you know, kind of darker stories were so many other people's lives who were affected, and we didn't always have them in the studio, we never had them in the studio. So there was no right to reply, so we did have to be very careful indeed and I don't believe that we ever did let anybody down, you know, or expose the wrong thing. But it was slightly – there were definitely times when I think we all felt that we were making quite gripping audio, but we would not have wanted to be making that audio ourselves. I think quite often we were surprised by what people told us and how much they told us. And you just always have to keep in the back of your mind whether or not making gripping radio is your ultimate aim in life and there were some moments that were talked about as well in the nervous breakdown programme, which I hope and assume have been helpful to anybody listening who, you know, wanted to better understand their own thoughts or to recognise behaviour in a vulnerable person. But at the same time, you also think God, I don't want to be making a radio programme that plants these thoughts in people's heads because that's obviously the flipside of the same coin. So I think it was a very – it was quite a kind of tightrope that we were walking on, but as far as I know, all of the people who contributed were happy to have done so. And actually, one of the most remarkable programmes in the series was partners of addicts talking about their experiences, which is just one of those things that's really not talked about very much. You know, programmes on addiction always focus on the addiction and actually, you know, the people in the background or supporting, or whatever, don't really have a huge opportunity to talk about themselves, aside from the addict that they love. You know, the conversation always veers back

to the addict, but actually that is a whole life and that's quite – you know, that is a life sentence, partnering somebody with, you know, with those kind of things going on. So I hope it did the trick. It's not recommissioned, so I think we did eight and they will always just stay as eight. I don't think it's coming back.

Q: [2:46:37] Well, I want to ask a different question about The Listening Project.

A: [2:46:37] Yes.

Q: [2:46:40] Before then going on to some of your other work. This is about sound and vision. You've beautifully described the intimacy of radio, but I was thinking when I looked on The Listening Project site of how effective it is to put animation to the sound.

A: [2:46:57] Ooh, yes.

Q: [2:46:59] And I just – well, talking about how you came to think about inviting animators, also the photographs of the participants.

A: [2:47:06] Yes.

Q: [2:47:07] Something about the role of the visual there.

A: [2:47:09] So the role of the visual is really interesting because I love the animations and we started doing the animations – it was Tony Phillips'

original idea to try out some animations and there was so much enthusiasm. So we went to different animation colleges around the country, or art colleges that had an animation course and, you know, they're student animations all of them, and they're absolutely brilliant. Really wonderful. And it's just fascinating to watch what one person sees when they're hearing, because none of them were predictable to me. So I would have heard those conversations loads of times, but never had that kind of a visual image to attach to them. So they're really absolutely brilliant, I really, really love them. Now, the photographs, you see, that's really interesting. So I never, ever look at the photographs of the participants because I find it so distracting in all the wrong ways because for me, as soon as I've seen a picture of somebody I have a different view of them to the view that I have if I never know what they look like. So I never, ever look at them. So I know that they're in a stylised form, aren't they, they're always taken together, two head shots, you know, whatever, whatever, and they're very simple, but I wouldn't be able – I don't ever see them, ever, ever see them, nor do I want to really. I just think you make such a judgement as soon as you look at a face and I just like my little images in my head.

Q: [2:48:44] Well, how about your feelings or relationship to sound in terms of voice, accent, maybe speaking about your own voice. I have to say, I've read that you are velvet-voiced.

A: [2:48:58] [Laughs] Yes, I'm velvet-voice. Well, I didn't say that of myself [laughs] 'cause that would be tragic. Gosh, you see, I love – yeah, I really – I would quite happily live in a world that only had sound in it, I'd quite happily, you know, not really have all the images. And people's voices, they just tell you everything, don't they? They tell you

everything. So sometimes I think with Donald Trump, it's not what he says, it's the way that he's saying it. I mean, that's what conveys to me every political leaning that he has, it's the way he says it. And wouldn't it be funny if you put, you know, all of his words and gave them to a very, sweet, 11-year-old girl from Birmingham to say? It probably – you just would have completely different connotations. So yes, I would happily live in the world of sound. There's no accent I don't like. there are lots of accents I still really, really struggle to understand. One of my worst failings is not being able to pronounce places properly, particularly in Wales which Lynne Rosser who's our fantastic Radio Wales producer, is world-weary with my Welsh pronunciations [laughs]. I do need to get better there. But yes, I love everything about the voice and just always have. And I don't mind hearing myself, but I wouldn't – you know, I don't listen to myself as a source of ultimate joy and pleasure, but it doesn't – you know, when I hear myself talking on the radio – 'cause lots of people when they hear themselves, when they listen back to themselves, they're first – you know, they just say, "Oh my God, that's terrible, I hate it, hate it." So I don't have that reaction to my own voice, but I don't think it is velvet-voiced actually, I think it's just quite a deep voice for a woman, I don't think it's particularly velvety.

Q: [2:51:07] I'm glad you mentioned about your deep voice or about relatively deep for a woman because I think over time there's been slightly less prejudice about women's voices on air. But I wondered about pitch and whether you've ever experienced any sense of, you know, women should speak this way or try to lower your pitch? Also about vocal fry which I've heard is a term to describe the slightly gravelly voices that many young women seem to have now.

A: [2:51:42] Ooh, now I've never heard that term before. Vocal fry?

Q: [2:51:46] Vocal fry.

A: [2:51:47] Fry, okay.

Q: [2:51:48] I actually heard this on Woman's Hour, let me think who was – Naomi Wolf –

A: [2:51:52] Yes.

Q: [2:51:53] Remember The Beauty Myth?

A: [2:51:53] The Beauty Myth, yeah.

Q: [2:51:54] She's doing workshops – well, this maybe a couple of years ago, for young American women who have high-pitched or who –

A: [2:52:02] [high-pitched voice] "Oh my God, so totally like, oh my God."

Q: [2:52:02] Yeah, and also the going up, you know, the high-rise terminal I think the term is [laughs] –

A: [2:52:10] Yes.

Q: [2:52:13] Saying how this doesn't convey authority. But the other side of it is, everybody now needs to speak with a slightly sexy, gravelly voice.

A: [2:52:20] Okay.

Q: [2:52:23] So, I shouldn't be saying all this [laughs], but I wonder what – you know, any sense of the gender politics of voice?

A: [2:52:30] So I think, yeah, I think there's a huge prejudice about women's voices. And Julie Burchill always used to say that actually, you know, she was one of the world's greatest radio presenters, discriminated against because of her voice. And she was, I mean, you know, she'd come on a radio programme, she came on quite a few 5 Live programmes and she would say the world's most blisteringly clever and funny and witty, sarcastic, sardonic things. But because she has a very high-pitched accented voice, people wouldn't laugh, or didn't find it funny, or immediately took against her. So I think the prejudice is there and is huge and marked. I don't know, is it a gender thing? I mean, I think men with squeaky voices also [laughs] – I mean, you know, David Beckham gets his fair share of piss-taking because he has a relatively high voice, or certainly an unexpected pitch. So I don't think it is just a gender thing, but undoubtedly the idea of a sexy female voice is a low voice and a gravelly one, and I have a low voice that can be quite gravelly, and I have definitely benefited from that. And in fact, when the – one of the criteria for getting a place on the Trainee Reporter's scheme at the BBC was purely on your voice. So they listened to tapes that we sent in before they looked at our CVs, and I don't know whether they still do that or are allowed to still do that, 'cause it obviously could be a little bit pejorative and prejudiced. But actually, what they were looking for was a wide spectrum of accents,

so it wasn't just about, you know, sounding good, and it certainly wasn't about sounding, you know, posh with Received Pronunciation. It was about the regionality which is a good thing. And I suppose I was picked for what I sound like reflecting where I come from as much as what I sound like so, you know, I can't complain about it. I mean, they chose very well. There were people from all kinds of – not all kinds of backgrounds actually, that would be wrong, but people from all kinds of places and all kinds of cultures and ethnicities. We were all pretty much university-educated and perhaps reflecting, you know, just middle-class lot. But yeah, the voices – it's changed hugely, so I think less so at Radio 4, but I know they're trying to address that, but if you listen across the day on Radio 2 or on 5 Live, you will hear all manner of different female voices. And I would hope that that says that there is no longer just, you know, one way of saying things. And the interesting thing as well which tells the story so much better, is the world of voiceovers. So now, you very rarely hear a voice like mine on an advert, whereas 20 years ago it would only be voices like mine on adverts. And if you're, you know, a bit of an audio bore like I am, you come to recognise them and there are some cracking women doing most of the voiceovers, you know, selling products now. And none of them are, you know, middle-class, White, university educated women and that's only to be a good thing. And if you think about all of the reality TV shows, and those voiceovers are really sought after, I mean, that's a massive payday. You know, if you're doing I'm A Celebrity or if you're doing Love Island, you know, they're big, big jobs and they're all really, really different, wonderfully different accented people. So it's a good thing, I think that ship has sailed.

Q: [2:56:32] And rhythm and pace I think's also interesting to track. I mean, in The Listening Project, to my mind it has that slower pace –

A: [2:56:41] Yes.

Q: [2:56:42] And maybe anticipating the rise of slow radio or part of it.

A: [2:56:45] So I think it does and it's funny, isn't it, 'cause actually I quite often notice – so the Sunday programme that we do on Radio 4, so I'll have four pieces of my own script as intro into all of the conversations, and my pace is often about one-and-a-half times faster than the lovely voices that then come on [laughs], because actually it is a slower pace, it's quite a thoughtful, gentle conversation and it's also not repartee, you know, 'cause the point is listening. So it does go really, you know, quite far down. And actually, that's quite rare. If you think about most conversations that you have during the day, they're quite fast because you don't – you're not actually usually listening, you're just dying to get to the next bit that you're going to say, and as soon as you make people sit down and listen then the pace definitely drops because there's some thinking involved and I think it's one of the very little referred to, but wonderful parts of the Project actually, that pace. Yep.

Q: [2:57:56] Well, maybe we can see a general question in My Perfect Country which I understand you've been presenting since 2015.

A: [2:58:05] Yes.

Q: [2:58:07] Fortunately, which you do with Jane Garvey and you've been doing since 2017, and Glass Half Full. For me, they all have in common a positive take [laughs]. They all have that comedy versus tragedy element.

A: [2:58:25] Yes.

Q: [2:58:26] What about comedy versus tragedy on, you know, the BBC?

A: [2:58:30] Oh, my God [laughs]. So I can't imagine ever making a radio programme that doesn't have those two elements in it, because it's just what life is, isn't it? And lots of people make really, really terrific radio programmes that are incredibly serious and they're worthwhile and I love listening to them, and that's not, you know, what I have turned out to do. And lots of people make the other side of it, which is just the funny, and that's got its place as well. But all of those programmes – I mean, Fortunately is interesting 'cause it's a podcast [laughs], and I don't think I would be exaggerating to say that when we started, the BBC was probably hoping maybe we'd do six and then, you know, we'd shut up and it wouldn't be very successful and they wouldn't have to worry about it at all. And it's just got a bit of a life of its own actually, and we've turned out to be – and I am totally shaking my own tush at this – one of the BBC's most successful podcasts [laughs], and that has surprised people a lot. So they're stuck with us now. But that is totally about the serious and the not serious, because it's Jane Garvey who's the most – I think one of the most brilliant broadcasters of our generation, host of Woman's Hour and just so clever and capable of taking on a serious topic, but it's me and her just talking how women talk which is a meandering path through the comic/tragic life experience, and of course, you know, as everyone knows as soon as you sit down with your female friends you'll do light and shade just within seconds. And, you know, that is our audience, our audience is really embraced that and lapped it up. And I think it would be fair to say that nearly every successful speech podcast, aside from the, you

know, true crime ones and investigative ones, all of the successful speech podcasts have that mix in it. Because people want to hear how people talk. So it's all part of the same thing, it's all part of the same thing that The Listening Project comes from, Shared Experience came from. You know, My Perfect Country is probably slightly different because it's a bit more journalistic, it's an examination of public policy, but it's about things working as opposed to immediately going, that's not worked, you know, let's look at why. It's saying, oh, my goodness, that has worked, let's look at why. So yeah, they're all the same, they are boringly the same thing, aren't they [laughs]?

Q: [3:01:12] Well, do you think they reflect something of you? Is it – are you the common denominator?

A: [3:01:19] Ooh, well, I suppose – yes, I suppose that there's an element of that. I mean, I wouldn't ever want to make another programme that wasn't about things – how things can work better, but I think that's an age thing for me. Because I think for me anyway, you know, my kids are still relatively young, they're 14 and 11, they are about to embark, you know, on that enormous entrance into the adult world. As far as I can make out their world is so different to what I understood at their age, I'm constantly having to ask myself to look for the good because otherwise you would put your head in your hands and never let them leave the house. So that's where my head is at. Just, you know, are they going to be okay? You know, what ill can befall them? And of course as every parent of teens and preens knows, it is no longer the stuff that's outside your front door that can hurt them, it's all the stuff that's coming in through the devices and the phones and stuff. So I have a relentless drive for positivity in my own head on a daily basis. But it's interesting because also, that's – you know, the BBC has that in

its great big, you know, kind of formal structure, this need to understand that new world, be part of it and not be a destructive part of it. Because lots of the other platforms on which people are putting their content seem to be involved in a really, really fast and vicious race to the bottom and the BBC has to be different. It has to still be a race to the top, so the more positive programmes they make the better, and it has to come from the BBC because if you were going to chase the popular line it's going down, so it's all part of the same thing.

Q: [3:03:19] It's interesting that you are still managing to be popular as well as to be positive. For example in the surprised success of, Fortunately.

A: [3:03:29] Yes [laughs], it is.

Q: [3:03:31] A lot of people want to have some hope.

A: [3:03:35] Yes, oh no, definitely because that's the human condition. I mean, otherwise we just wouldn't be here, so it's totally – no, it's totally caught up, bound up in that. And, you know, our feedback from Fortunately is really interesting because our audience grew, you know, we've had very little marketing or outside advertising, I think actually none, so we're a proper word-of-mouth and sharing success. And from what we see of why people share, it's always the same thing, I'm having a shit time and they've made me laugh. You know, that's what our audience is. And we're only making people laugh by relating our own experience of life [laughs] which we would not get through unless we were laughing about it. I mean, that's just – that is the human condition, isn't it, so you have to try and find that. And, you know, I

think if I was young today I would need to find that more than ever really.

Q: [3:04:40] You mentioned Jane Garvey as obviously one of the two key people on Woman's Hour –

A: [3:04:44] Yeah.

Q: [3:04:46] And I say two, I mean, as far as I know Jenni Murray and Jane Garvey are the two main presenters.

A: [3:04:53] [Both talking at once] Yeah.

Q: [3:04:54] Could you compare and contrast Fortunately to Woman's Hour?

A: [3:04:57] Ooh, well, Fortunately would come out badly, I mean, it's not a podcast dedicated to women's issues or celebrating women's achievements, you know, which is what Woman's Hour is and does. So Fortunately – I mean, our remit is to talk to people about what happens behind the scenes of showbiz. That's mainly what we're meant to do, so our guests will be very random, you know, from authors and writers to DJs and TV presenters and stuff. And all we're doing is just, you know, doing an interview about them and kind of laughing about our own lives that week. So, you know, we're not really on the same page as Woman's Hour. I mean, the only similarity really is that we're women and that's Jane's proper day job.

Q: [3:05:49] Do you have anything you could say about Woman's Hour just as a listener or somebody not involved in it, in terms of its role? I think it's become more feminist over the years in the long-run. What do you think about Woman's Hour's political role?

A: [3:06:08] So I think Woman's Hour's political role has become more and more relevant as it's become more and more obvious that all of the things that women and nice men have thought they were fighting for with the same strength, vigour and valour, have not really yet come good. So, I mean, how astonishing that, you know, if you were sitting in that Woman's Hour chair in 1967 when the Equal Pay Act was passed, you can't possibly have thought, tell you what, my sisters will still be on the barricades in 2019 where it will have been revealed that they're still being paid rubbish by comparison to the men. You wouldn't have thought that, so it's more important than ever. I mean, it's astonishing that it's still having to tackle basically the same subjects that it did 50 years ago, so – I mean, my thing at Woman's Hour is I just hate the fact that it's on at a time where nearly every woman I know is out at work because that's what we do [laughs], and that it's called Woman's Hour and, you know, Jane's really funny about this and she says, you know – I think she would agree with both those things actually. I don't want to speak for her though, but she says, "You know, what else would you call it?" You know, "Family Time"? You know, "Oh dear, it's not worked?" I mean, you know, what's the alternative? 'cause the problem with Woman's Hour is if it ever alienates a non-woman to not listen to it, 'cause of course everything that's on Woman's Hour is hugely, hugely relevant to everybody. So those are my only frustrations with it, otherwise – I mean, there is an argument that sometimes issues are ghettoised and put in the silo because other programmes, you know, will say, "Oh, no, well Woman's Hour will cover that," and actually they should – you know, there are things that should just be on

the news agenda, so I think that's always a danger when you've got a special place. But, you know, you can say the same about any programme. You know, there are probably lots of legal issues that don't make it onto the Today Programme 'cause you've got Law in Action, so it's the same kind of thing. But it's a great institution, you know, and long may it last.

Q: [3:08:22] Going back to the point about positive thinking and positive radio –

A: [3:08:28] Yeah.

Q: [3:08:29] I noted that you have a new controller, Mohit Bakaya.

A: [3:08:32] Yeah.

Q: [3:08:35] From 2019, just relatively recent, and as I understand it he is wanting the BBC to focus on positive thinking. Could you comment on that and maybe your note that The Listening Project might change?

A: [3:08:52] Yes, so I know that Mo Bakaya wants to change some of the tone and direction of Radio 4 I think in two ways. So one is to where you can, be more positive and explain how the world can work better. And it's always worth bearing in mind that the statistics back him up on the need and desire to do that. So we've never lived in a time of such splendour, you know, across the world, you know, we are better educated, healthier, have more freedom of movement and have more equality than at any other time on the planet. And you really wouldn't think that's where we are if you listened across, you know, most daily news output. So I think he's absolutely right to try and find

proper ways of telling that message. You know, not in a kind of propaganda way, but it's just fact, it's just fact, and it is getting lost in the turmoil. So I know that that's one direction that he wants to take, and also, you know, Radio 4's demographic is not optimistic. You know, its average listener is well over 50 and there are not enough younger listeners, you know, joining all of the programmes. And, you know, you can argue that that's always been the case and that maybe previously that changes because people make an automatic transfer to Radio 4, you know, about the same time that they buy a wider fitting shoe. But that's not really going to be the case this time around because there's just so much else on offer, and lots of other people will have got their brands in sooner. So I think he's trying to address exactly that too. So, you know, I'm not trying to secure my mortgage and my future by saying that I agree with him on both those things, I mean, you know, I just do agree with him on both those things [laughs]. So The Listening Project is going to take on a little bit of a change because he would like us to try not having people who know and love each other sitting down to talk about stuff that matters, and that's our kind of tagline at the moment, he would like us to be encouraging people to come into the Project who don't know each other but feel that they have something that they would like to know more about each other and discuss. So it's this idea that we're creating a public space where people from different communities or different backgrounds or different thought and ideology processes can bump into each other and actually have a conversation, instead of bumping into each other and just walking off in the opposite direction. So that's what we're going to try and do. And it's a tall order, because it's different, you know, that's a different proposition actually when you're sitting down in the booth or, you know, in the radio station together because our conversations flow from that place of really knowing the person that you're talking to. So it is a change and we

haven't made any of those programmes yet. That's just what's coming up on the cards.

Q: [3:12:13] And will you have to match-make or find people to...?

A: [3:12:17] Well, so I think the idea, you know, very much as when we first started with The Listening Project, the idea is that one person will come to us and say – so, I mean, let's say I was that person, there are loads of people living in my street in Hackney who I say hello to, sometimes, you know, stop and have a chat about parking difficulties, but know no more about their lives and I'd like to actually, and it's – you know, it's a failing that the way that we live today doesn't enable me to meet those people in any other place, you know, apart from bumping into them in the street. So I would contact The Listening Project and say, do you know what, I'm quite interested to know more, you know, about the family who live at Number 63, you know, could you fix it for me to try and do that? And then we would try and help those two people sit down and have that conversation. Or they can be people who, you know, vaguely know each other but have just never been given the opportunity to sit down and get to know each other better. So it will take more production, it's not quite of your own volition as it is now.

Q: [3:13:28] Well, I'd like to now go back to your point about 50 years after the Equal Pay Act –

A: [3:13:32] Yes.

Q: [3:13:33] We're still struggling to ask about women and equality, diversity, and inclusion in the BBC.

A: [3:13:39] Yes. Where would you like me to start with that one [laughs]?

Q: [3:13:40] Well, maybe you could start with Sound Women, when it started, its remit, then leading up to Samira Ahmed's very recent event.

A: [3:13:48] Yeah, so Sound Women was a – we never really knew what to call ourselves. We were a collection of women who were put together by Maria Williams who was my former editor at Saturday Live and a former editor at Woman's Hour, and she came out – she was on the board of the Sony Music Awards one year and she found the temperature in the room to be too masculine, so it just wasn't recognising all of these wonderful achievements made by women in the industry, or recognising the fact that 51 percent of listenership to radio in the UK is female. So we're an industry whose audience needs us to be equal. It would be fair for that to have happened. So Maria's not a woman to take things lightly, so she decided instead of just feeling bad about it or down about it, she'd do something about it. So she brought quite a few of us together and we formed a group called Sound Women and our desire was to try and change the imbalance within the industry and to celebrate female achievement in the industry, and to support women in the audio industry to be able to do whatever it was that they felt they couldn't be doing at the time. So we did lots of things. We ran lots of workshops, we had some fantastic away days, we went to Parliament, we talked to important people, we tried as much as possible to get out of London and to, you know, be there for the sisters in the regions, and I think in the end – we no longer exist as a lobbying group, I think in the end we probably tried to do a little bit too much and we were all doing it voluntarily and is often the case, you know, it becomes – I mean, not too arduous 'cause all of us were really, really and dedicated to the cause, but it became difficult to know exactly what we could – where we could go next. But it's been really interesting, so that was about eight or nine years ago. We

definitely managed to change some things. We were really successful in our aims when we started. Tony Hall brought in his quotas for a change in the breakfast show makeup across the country at local radio level, where women were no longer only on programmes to read travel and weather, but half of the production on air had to be female. So that meant you had to have a co-presenter or the actual presenter, so no women being asked to titter in the background, you know, whilst a massively entertaining male dominates the microphone. So, you know, that came as a direct response to research that Sound Women had commissioned just showing how few female voices were on air across the country at key times in key roles. So stuff like that definitely started a change. Our message at Sound Women was always to try and help, you know, just like we can recognise this is a problem so how can we help, you know, what can we do to actually try and solve it? And I think with the benefit of hindsight it makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable that we weren't listened to more because I think what then transpired about the gap in female and male pay at the BBC was remarkable in all of the worst ways. And when we were knocking on all of those doors saying, you know, "Look at the research that we have, look at the membership that we've already achieved, look at the problems that our female colleagues are telling us," I think it's sad that we weren't listened to a little bit more. Because it's just – people knew what was happening at the BBC. It was only a mystery to people outside the BBC what was happening within the BBC. There were lots of people who knew that there was a massive pay gap, lots of people. And they must have known when we were, you know, asking them to change things or talk to us more, come to away days, explain pay structures, so it's been interesting.

Q: [3:18:26] Why do you think it wasn't listened to earlier?

A: [3:18:30] So I honestly can't answer that question because I'm never privy to a management meeting or an editorial meeting, and there's this extraordinary Chinese wall at the BBC as in lots and lots of other creative companies where if you are the creative and the content maker you're so far removed from the management of the corporation or the company. You know, the two things really aren't crossing at all. So there are lots of extremely, you know, talented and very decent people working in middle management and, you know, in editorial who've got no idea what anyone's being paid. There was no transparency, there was no way of knowing. But from a certain level up you would know, you just would know. So, you know, I mean, I'm not going to defend the indefensible. I mean, if you were at the BBC and, you know, you had a budget meeting every year about staff salaries and you knew all of the people in your department and you could quite clearly see who was being paid less, why didn't you do something about it? And it's funny, because any women who works at the BBC especially if you're front of house, so you have a voice, we are always asked this question and we don't have an answer. But all of the people who do have the answer, never have to be asked the question. It's not terrific. It might need looking at a little bit more and I think it will do now, I think Carrie Gracie's case and Samira Ahmed's case, both of which personally are brave cases for women to have taken. I think there's no coming back from what both of those revealed. I mean, it would just be absolutely absurd if people didn't try and push on through and solve those problems. You know, they're bad, they're bad.

Q: [3:20:31] What might be the implication for the World Service?

A: [3:20:36] In the Samira Ahmed employment tribunal?

Q: [3:20:37] Yeah.

A: [3:20:38] So I think the implications of Samira's case are really interesting and not quite yet fully understood because there always needed to be quite a big busting open of the matrix that was being used to determine who was being paid what and where in the BBC. Because if you start from a basic structure of equal work means equal pay, you know, if you have people who are working nightshifts, you know, eight-hour nightshifts in the World Service newsroom because, you know, the territory that they're servicing is wide awake during your nightshift in London. You're doing a long stint, it's very highly pressurised, you know, you're up against all of the same kind of hurdles that you are in a domestic newsroom with all of the stress that that entails, why would you be paid less? You're also reaching an audience potentially of 58 million, you know, than someone who's working a day shift in a smaller newsroom, you know, perhaps with a more comfortable news agenda and, you know, that person might be being paid more. I mean, I don't know for a fact how many people aren't being paid more or whatever, but it's really interesting for the BBC because there have always been – you know, regional news is paid differently to national news, but if you're on air every day sitting in the same studio, you've done the same amount of work, why? Why – and you're reaching your maximum audience, that nobody could possibly – you know, nobody with the wildest twinkle in their eye could possibly reach any more of an audience, why would you be paid any less? So it is really interesting to see where that goes, really interesting. I mean, I don't have any answers to it at all and I'm also really not saying that that's a BBC specific problem, because I think that's everywhere, that's everywhere in news. But it does need explaining, definitely. And it's never been explained before.

Q: [3:22:42] Could you give any sense of how much a salary would be? I know – how could you do that 'cause there's too many different jobs, but I don't know, an average – say a starting presenter's salary or – you know, and how does that compare to outside the BBC?

A: [3:22:57] I've got no idea and that's the other weird thing. So I don't know – I mean, unless they appear on the high pay list, I don't know what my colleagues earn and, I mean, some – you know, with people I know well, we'll have a very open conversation about pay but, you know, most people don't. And I've got absolutely no idea of, you know, what a presenter on BBC News West is earning by comparison to, you know, someone presenting Start The Week, I honestly don't know. And the awful thing is that they don't know each other's and one of them will be higher and one of them will be lower, so I honestly wouldn't be able to tell you. I mean, all I can tell you is just from 30, nearly 30 years in the business, [laughs] is that there are – just in my own journey, I've sometimes been – the disparity in my own pay I find hard to explain. I mean, there are sometimes – you know, when I was in my late 20s when I was paid more for a programme than I am now in my 50s and I don't – you know, the audience numbers are probably the same, there'll be something in there about impact or presumably, you know, in my 20s was I more sought after? I don't know, I'm an old hag now so maybe that's factored into it. But it's quite odd when you look at it and I don't know whether it is the same for men. But there definitely isn't a trajectory where your experience is being rewarded. Mine's gone like that [makes up and down motion with hand] and I'm none the wiser as to why.

Q: [3:24:35] Are you a member of the NUJ?

A: [3:24:37] No, I've been a member of Equity and I know that might

sound quite strange, but there are a couple of things that Equity has fought for and over which I've been keen to be a part of, and, you know, I'm not dissing the NUJ in saying that, but I enjoy my Equity membership. And also, as someone who hasn't been in news for quite a long time, I don't – I feel quite comfortable with my union choice, but sometimes I've said that to people [laughs] and they have just gone, "Are you in panto this year? What's going on?" I'm not in panto this year [laughs].

Q: [3:25:20] We've interviewed Annie Nightingale for this project –

A: [3:25:22] Oh, fantastic.

Q: [3:25:25] I mentioned in part that I saw she was a patron of Sound Women.

A: [3:25:28] Yeah.

Q: [3:25:29] Well, is there anything you want to say about her but also, who are the new Annie Nightingale's?

A: [3:25:36] Oh my goodness, Gemma Cairney definitely. So I love Gemma Cairney, I think she's witty and funny and she can be spikey, and she really knows her music, and I think she's really wonderful. I mean, it depends what you mean by an Annie Nightingale. You mean someone who's going to survive for 50 years or someone who's kind of eclectic? I think Nemone is brilliant on 6 Music, really brilliant and she's got a voice like melting honey as well, and she'll play kind of – you know, she'll play, so electric music is her specialty and she manages to be able to play that when she sits in on the breakfast show, you know, at eight-thirty in the morning and it sounds perfectly reasonable. You

just think, yeah, no, I can do that. So I think she's terrific as well. Otherwise – ooh, I don't know.

Q: [3:26:38] Well, who are the new Jane Garveys and Jenni Murrays?

A: [3:26:40] Ooh, gosh, that's a good question. That's a very good question. So there's a really – there have been some fantastic younger women over at 5 Live, so Chloe Tilley I think is brilliant, she's doing quite a lot of 5 Live Drive at the moment. Anna Foster and Sam Walker I've hugely rated. I think nobody can deny that Emma Barnett is like one of the brightest planets that has ever, ever been spotted in the broadcasting galaxy, I mean, she's just amazing and really, hats off to her, because her confidence, her knowledge, her dedication, you know, she's just the real deal. So there are lots of them around, definitely.

Q: [3:27:33] And what about women in management? We've interviewed also Lorna Clarke, but you've mentioned Gwyneth Williams. You know, were there managers who are very supportive or maybe who were less supportive, or you'd want to mention?

A: [3:27:50] Oh my good God, okay [laughs]. So do you know what, I've become kind of further removed actually from management and being under the direct control of a Controller for the last couple of years because the programmes that I do now are not – wouldn't be regarded as, you know, top flight, you know, the BBC will fall down if this programme doesn't succeed, kind of shows. So I haven't really needed enormous levels of, you know, career support. And I have to say that I think I've probably been lucky in that I've never – I mean, I've never had to go to an employment tribunal over my wages at the BBC, I have not had to get a union involved in any case or contract so, you

know, I'm not in a position where I've really needed the support that my colleagues have definitely needed and some of them not got, patently obviously not got. So I don't have any particular beef, and I mean, there's no way of saying this without it sounding sycophantic but Bob Shennan was my Controller at 5 Live when I did big shows at 5 Live, and he was incredibly encouraging and helpful. And I think he has been really good at assessing the impact of all of this unhappiness at the BBC and he seems to be a very human face of management who understands. I mean, there's lots of things going on at the BBC at the moment, so aside from, you know, difficulties over equality and pay there's also been a massive change in freelancers' status because of the IR35 change in tax, and it really effects people, you know, who have thought that they were doing the right thing for the last 15 years and have been told that they're not, and the impact on their lives has been really difficult. And I think actually Bob has reached into both of those kind of dark abysses and really tried to help people, so I'm admiring of his work. And I'm glad you've talked to Lorna Clarke 'cause she's only just come back into the BBC, hasn't she, and she's really – I really rate Lorna, I think she's a top lady, yeah.

Q: [3:30:28] I noted that the Board is getting slowly more women-inclusive. Six out of the 15 members of the Executive Committee are women now. Anne Bulford, first women deputy director-general and Zarin Patel as group finance director. This is actually from the 2017-2018 Equality Information Report that I found. I don't know if you have anything to do with these people, it may be they're quite separate but –

A: [3:30:58] I wouldn't recognise them if we were stuck in a packed lift together, no [laughs].

Q: [3:31:04] Okay, well, some last comments, just sort of sweeping questions about sweeping changes. The nature and significance of the move to BBC Sounds, actually under Lorna Clarke I think, and what does it tell us about the way radio's being reorganised?

A: [3:31:25] So I think BBC Sounds in the long-run is going to be a wonderful thing and I think it had a difficult launch, I think the actual – the functionality of the app itself seemed to disappoint a lot of people, so that was tricky. And, you know, again I think it's one of those things that sometimes we don't understand enough about if we're making the content, 'cause you just assume that somebody unbelievably clever will have pressed every single different option, side-swipe, whatever, and sorted it all out for you so you can place your dramatic content in front of as wide an audience as possible, and I don't think that happened first time around. But I think the idea – you know, the idea that you go to one place to find all your audio is just essential, absolutely essential, and I watch the little, you know, finger journey that my kids take when they're making choices and if they don't get there in two, there's something else that's caught their attention first. So I think BBC Sounds, you know, will triumph. It seems to carry lots of really good stuff, I mean, I use it myself and I've, you know, found play lists and people that I wouldn't have come across before, so I think that's all good. You know, my big thing is just where the BBC as a brand stands in my kids' world. You know, what that initial reaction is for them to it, because for me when I was growing up, it was the epitome of everything that was wonderful about journalism. I mean, just, you know, the first time that I walked into the building as a BBC employee was one of the happiest moments of my life. I mean, there was just nothing in my head that ever said, uh-huh, things – you know, this might not be a terrific place to be. And whether or not that will be the same for them, you know, I don't know. And it's weird to consider that really,

'cause if you love the BBC – a colleague of mine said [laughs], "It's a little bit like watching an elderly relative die," [laughs] and I thought, well that's an extreme way of putting it, and I hope that's not the case, I really hope that's not the case. And, you know, people with brighter, better, younger minds than mine will be sorting that out and, you know, I warmly embrace them trying to do that.

Q: [3:33:46] Well, that was one of my next questions was, the license fee settlement as it engages with –

A: [3:33:53] Yeah.

Q: [3:33:54] The BBC's ability to compete with these [megamoths 3:33:59] or whatever they are, Netflix and company.

A: [3:34:02] Well, I think the BBC – I can't see that the BBC fails, but it's just got such an interesting place hasn't it, because inasmuch as people like me might love the BBC, always want to work for it and create the very best content for it, I'm not in a culture Select Committee over in Westminster with a lot of other different political ambitions and pressures on me, deciding the future of the BBC. So it's odd, you know, we're not dictated by our success, you know, our future is dictated by our success and something else which is always going to make it complicated. Personally, I can't see a time in the future, let's say 20/30 years' time, when people are going to be happy to pay a licence fee for something that they might not feel they're getting their money back from. Because that equation in our heads that I might only listen to, you know, Radio 2 but I know the BBC's serving a greater purpose, I'm not sure that that thought process retains much validity for future generations. Because they feel more empowered about what it is down the line that's good for them. So I'd be amazed if we carry on

and on having a licence fee, but I think it would be a terrible, a really dark day if the BBC didn't survive. And not necessarily for programmes like mine and all the ones that I've worked on, but just for that impartiality and news. And, you know, the BBC might not get it right all the time, but at least it's trying. And I mean, you know, it's like any teacher in the class, they'd rather have a classroom full of kids that are really trying, you know, even if they're not getting the answer right all the time, than a load of people who are just copying out their homework from somewhere else. So, you know, go figure, you know, I hope it does, I *really* hope it survives.

Q: [3:36:08] Well, on the occasional getting it wrong but hugely public problems when it happens, what about the moments of Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross or the Iraq/Gilligan affair or perhaps even worse, the Savile case?

A: [3:36:26] Oh my gosh, okay. So, yeah, okay. So definitely lessons are learnt from all of those that have – and actually it's quite an important thing to say. So, you know, lessons have been learnt is such a kind of catch-all phrase, isn't it, but actually what all three of those different BBC scandals have meant is a different way of working on a daily basis which is about compliance, it's about water-tight editorial decisions and it's about just always referring to a wiser, more experienced person, you know, if in doubt. And, you know, all of those things have changed the way that people have to make programmes, you know, it definitely – I mean, compliance has made a producer's workload tougher, definitely, but I don't that you would then say that the content being made has been watered down because of that. So that's obviously – someone's taking – you know, the slack is being picked up by people behind the scenes 'cause our content, what we put out, is still really good. So all of those three things have, you know, had a

massive, massive impact and everybody survived, and that's just so important to realise as well. Because often you can feel in a huge corporation, you know, that heads haven't rolled or justice hasn't been served or, you know, somehow the wrong people haven't been pulled up. But also it can feel like it's nothing to do with you, and I think all three of those cases – you know, people on the shop floor and people like me just making programmes, have felt an impact, felt something, thought about something, recalibrated something, been more aware of things. You know, they're not just things that you can blame on somebody else, nor should they have been, 'cause they're all pretty bad, aren't they, yep.

Q: [3:38:38] Was any one of those more personally meaningful to you? Do you remember, you know, hearing about –

A: [3:38:46] Well, I think – I mean, funnily enough – so this isn't in the order of, you know, how bad all of those three incidents were, but I think it's the Jonathan Ross/Russell Brand one that had the most impact on the programmes that I was working on. Just because they were going in search of a laugh, weren't they, that's what they were doing, and they took it too far and created a whole heap of unpleasantness. Also, just really properly at the expense of a woman, I mean, just extraordinarily so. So, you know, it does make you feel uncomfortable if anybody thought it was going to be okay to talk about a woman's, they really actually didn't know, sex life on air. I mean, that's just mind-boggling, so I – for me, I think I find that, you know, the most troublingly offensive actually, just on a kind of personal level. And also, because it just kind of skated through on "they're just having a laugh" thing and you just always have to remember if you're just trying to have a laugh that, you know, it's a really fine line sometimes. You know, because you can make people laugh, you can absolutely make people laugh by being

offensive. And quite often on Fortunately on our tiny little podcast, because we go slightly, you know, – [sighs] our conversation is looser than it would be if we were in a studio on air, you know, Jane and I will say things kind of deliberately to make each other laugh or to make a guest laugh and, you know, sometimes they are – you know, it's not in the best of taste and we'll pull back from them or ask Sam our very lovely producer [laughs] to cut them out in the edit. 'Cause you just have to think of who you could offend, so yeah, but I mean, the other – if I'd been working in news journalism I think it would be the other two that would have had the greater impact.

Q: [3:41:03] Thank you. Well, we've talked about some of the crises –

A: [3:41:08] Yes.

Q: [3:41:09] But I think overall you've also talked a lot about the very sort of hugely important role of the positive and I think, to me, that's something that links together many of your own contributions. As we come to the end, do you think as a woman who has succeeded quite well in the BBC, do you think that Greg Dyke's complaint, "the BBC is hideously White and middle-class," and I think that was back in 2001, do you think that's beginning to be out of date?

A: [3:41:45] God, I hope so, yes and I think – so I think the BBC is working really hard to correct that balance, but could it be doing it quicker and with more impact? I think so. And Amol Rajan, our media correspondent and all-round BBC talent, I thought was really terrific when he reported on the high pay list because people focussed on how few women were in the list and they were absolutely right to do so, but also there were so few people from any other background other than well-off and university-educated in that list. And whenever

he reported on the list, he made sure that he mentioned those two things and gave them equal weight, because of course you're only one side of an argument if you're only make programmes or allowing programmes to be made or encouraging programmes to be made by people who have one experience of life. It doesn't matter how good a journalist you are; you carry something of yourself with you every time you speak or ask a question or make an assumption. So I think the BBC probably does have a really long way to go on that. And I hope it's not one of those things where, you know, there's a kind of – you know, there's a boxing match between under-represented, badly paid, unfairly paid different parts of the organisation. You know, we do all have to fight. You know, I am undoubtedly the product of a relatively well-off, middle class background and I'm a woman. Should I only fight for better rights for women, you know, leave everybody else's experience to one side? You know, of course I shouldn't, but at the same time I don't want my experiences as a woman to be dismissed because I don't come from a different background. So we just all have to, you know, really find some common ground, and make the changes. But I have to say, that everywhere I go in the BBC it's a conversation that people are having, and it didn't use to be. It really didn't use to be. So that's got to affect change somehow. And never has there been a time when the BBC hasn't been under so much scrutiny, ever, ever. So if things aren't being done right, you know, the great thing about the sheer volume of feedback received [laughs], you know, is that voices are heard. Yeah, so I hope it changes. I mean, it just won't survive if it doesn't.

Q: [3:44:28] Well, I was going to say, do we still need a BBC, but I think you've said that we do [laughs].

A: [3:44:31] Oh, we so need a BBC, we so need a BBC, yeah. So imagine

if we didn't have one.

Q: [3:44:39] What about the Reithian mission of the BBC?

A: [3:44:42] Yes.

Q: [3:44:45] Do you have a sense of that, what it means, and do you think it's still part of the BBC's DNA?

A: [3:44:50] What, to educate, inform and entertain [laughs]? So, I think it justifies nearly everything the BBC does to this day. I mean, it's just a really, really clever strapline, isn't it? So I'm trying to think – I mean, I suppose you could put "represent" in there as, you know, the one thing that is missing from the mission statement, and if you put represent alongside then I think you have covered all bases. But it's funny, you know, after so nearly 30 years at the BBC it's amazing how often entertain, educate, and inform is mentioned. You know, it's still there in commissioning meetings, in programme debriefs, in justification of budgets, you know, it's a remarkable thing going through the stick of rock. And, you know, people do still really think about it. But yes, I think, "and represent" would be good.

Q: [3:45:50] Quick further question on your own life.

A: [3:45:52] Yes.

Q: [3:45:54] What happens outside of work, what nurtures you?

A: [3:45:57] Oh my good God, well, family life definitely, far too many pets [laughs] as your lovely production team has discovered today as well, and increasingly low-level literature, I read far too much crime fiction,

far too much, and actually – I mean, to be serious for a second, just the joy of getting older and, you know, I definitely – I really, really like middle-age [laughs], which Is not something you ever think you're going to find yourself saying, but yes, you know, I just like that sense of it not all being quite so hectic anymore. Although actually, it is quite hectic so – but you know what I mean.

Q: [3:46:49] Well, that leads me to the question I wanted to ask earlier about if you were going to do a Listening Project conversation yourself –

A: [3:46:57] Yes.

Q: [3:46:58] What would it be?

A: [3:47:01] Oh my goodness, so I would sit down with my sister. So we're two years apart, Izi lives just round the corner from me here, she too has two children, a son, and a daughter. You know, we have lived our lives really in each other's pockets actually, but we are so different, and I would just love – so we've looked at exactly the same sunset from different sides of the bay, you know, all our lives and I would love to sit down and ask her – and also 'cause I think The Listening Project would be the one place where we would have to lose that dynamic of older sister/younger sister and it is one of the reasons why the Project works, is you can't take all of that baggage in because, you know, you're on a level playing field, and so that would be great. So all of the questions that I've really badgered her with for 50 years, she'd actually have to answer [laughs], which is why she's never going to do it [laughs].

Q: [3:48:10] Well, the final question then, in contrast as a BBC oral history we've done a history focussing on your career, what contribution do

you think an oral history about the BBC, from the internal perspective can make? You know, maybe in contrast to The Listening Project.

A: [3:48:33] What, so this?

Q: [3:48:35] Yes, this and the BBC's own inhouse oral history.

A: [3:48:40] Yeah, so I think it's just fascinating because everyone has a relationship with the BBC, you know, whether or not you're in denial about it, you just do, you just will have watched their programmes, you are paying, you know, the wages of people like me [laughs] and so, I think it's – I mean, it's just essential really and also fascinating. So, I mean, one of the surprise hits in comedy was W1A because on paper that looked so self-congratulatory and self-absorbed and stupid, you know, a comedy series about what goes on, you know, in a place that makes comedy series. You know, it just seemed to be kind of comedy eating itself. But people loved it because it just exposed this bizarre world that you almost know, but you don't really know. So I think it's very important, yeah.

Q: [3:49:39] Well, that's the last of my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to say that you think is important?

A: [3:49:44] No, I'm exhausted [both laugh].

[END OF RECORDING – 03:49:56]