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Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (ia + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** = (ph + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode).

Moderator: It's Wednesday 18th December and I'm with Professor Liz Kelly. Liz is Director of the Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit at the London Metropolitan University, and holds the Roddick Chair on violence against women. Liz is sharing her experience of working in the women's voluntary and community sector and campaigning for women's right for the Sisters Doing It For Themselves archive. Liz, if you can begin.

Liz Kelly: Good morning, and apologies to anybody's who's listening to this because I actually have a very horrible cold, but there we go. We already had to cancel once, so it felt more important to actually do this than postpone again.

Moderator: Well, Liz, if you can begin by talking about what influenced your decision to work in the sector for women's rights, and also whether the first refuge in Chiswick had any significance to that decision?

Liz Kelly: Okay. My story actually begins with the Women's Liberation movement. I was living in Norwich, which is a small town in the-, no, it's a city. I apologise, Norwich. It's a city in the east of England, and I was a young woman who had had a child unexpectedly and I was a little bit lost. I didn't have any women friends. My daughter's father's friends were mainly other men, and I was floating, I think. A mutual acquaintance said that there was going to be a meeting of the Women's Liberation movement in the city, in a pub, ironically called The Adam and Eve, and I went along. It literally changed my life. I was resistant. I was ambivalent, and I just had this sense of 'this is what I've been waiting for. This is what makes sense of why I feel so lost'. It also partly made sense to me of why I'd had quite a fractious relationship with my father, who was deeply religious, and I used to have long, into the night, literally, arguments with him about ethics and politics. So, it just gave me a space in which I felt I could become someone, not bounded by all the things that I'd felt were restricting and didn't make sense to me as a teenager.

I then got involved in helping women up at the university start a Women's Liberation group up there. Then, a woman who had been away living elsewhere for about two years, came to the town group with an article about the Chiswick refuge to say did we think we might need one in Norwich? It seemed ridiculous, and people look at me strangely when I say this, we literally didn't know whether we did or not. That's how little we knew. This is 1973. That's how little we knew about domestic violence then. So, you could imagine that you'd need one in London, but Norwich is a different matter. I immediately became involved in that group. I was probably one of the youngest in the group. I was also one of only two or three who were from a working

class background, so I kind of felt at home and not at home. I felt at home with the issue and what we wanted to do, but I felt surrounded by women who had, I don't know, many more skills than me, and now, what I would say now, I didn't have those words then, I'd say they had loads of cultural capital that I didn't have, and were very at ease in each other's very nice houses, when I was living in a grotty, rented house.

Nonetheless, they were women who had a politics of finding ways to do things together, collectively, and so that became-, I carried on in the Women's Liberation group, which was about thinking-, I also was in a consciousness-raising group all through this time, and in the group seeking to establish the refuge. We got a house fairly quickly. I don't know whether we were the second or the third. I think we were the second refuge outside London to open. The first one was St Albans, as I remember, and because we had a Labour council and they gave us a little terraced house. For the first week no one came, and we thought, 'Maybe we were wrong.' Then the first woman who came had actually been thrown out of a car by an aristocrat, which was a very good lesson for all of us about not to make assumptions about who needs refuges and who domestic violence happens to. From that moment the house was never not full to bursting, and because I was one of the youngest I used to work with the children, and I had a small child at the time, so she used to come with me.

I spent probably four years working with the children, mainly taking them out to the park because there wasn't any other space in the house. Also building up, when I myself went to university to my degree, when my daughter went to school, building up links with the student union so that we very often had the student union van at the weekend to take the kids to the seaside. We always had one of the student union minibuses all through the summer to take the children, to give them some of the freedom that I think children's lives are often very un-free when they're living with domestic and, again, I don't think I-, I understood this in a organic way, not in a theorised way then, or I think we all did, that actually being able to take these children out and let them just be wild and shout at the seaside, and run, and not be controlled, was actually a very wonderful and exciting thing for them, but also for us to witness them being free in that way.

Moderator: So, the first refuge really was very significant?

Liz Kelly: Yes. Yes, very significant in my-, I also have a very complicated story I could tell about Erin Pizzey but I don't know whether that's relevant or useful. The first refuge, the one that Erin Pizzey set up, was significant in my history in a number of ways, actually. Within about, I think-, I think this was 1975 was the first conference of the however many refuges there were by that point. I think probably about 30 or 40. Some groups hadn't got a house yet but they were in the process of wanting to develop one in their area. We all met at a conference in London and I came up with some of the nice but more middle class than me women from the group that I was in. From the start it was fractious because Erin had invited a psychologist called Dr Jasper Gayford, who gave a paper where he created these stereotypes, not types, stereotypes, of abused women, one of whom was called Fanny the Flirt, and another one was called Go-Go Gloria. This was to a room of (TC 10.00) predominantly women's liberationists. It did not go down well at all. In fact, he was booed off the platform, wherever he was talking.

Then that evening, I only knew about this the next day, everybody from my group apart from me had been invited to drinks in Erin's garden in her big house in Chiswick. I wasn't invited. I've thought afterwards how interesting that was, how interesting that she saw-, what was it that she saw in me that she didn't want in her garden? As things progressed I think the group in Norwich became more and more feminist, and more and more lesbians joined the group, and some of the original founders kind of drifted away as the group became more and more political, and more and more committed to particular ways of working. Also, more and more committed to involving the women who lived in the house in the management of the house, but also in the politics of the movement. I often talk about some of the things that I remember most from that time would be going up, again in the student union minibus, to Women's Aid conferences, and they'd be two or three of, we called ourselves the support group, and then five, six of women who lived in the house and their children.

We took them to conference. The whole journey, because I don't drive, so the whole journey there I would be trying to talk through what the issues were coming up at the conference. Also, what is a workshop, all sorts of things that actually women don't automatically have access to, or certainly didn't then, anyway. Then all the way back trying to talk through some of the disputes and contentions that had happened at conference. I just remember those-, and also, for so many of those women, going to their first women only disco. Again, something about freedom. Seeing women dance without the male gaze on them. So, I remember those times as being really joyous and exciting, exhausting, but actually about that it really was about a 'we'. That the women who lived in the house and the women who supported them were not so different, and it was our movement, and that we should all be part of building that movement and deciding on its direction. I feel like we've-, I have a slide in several presentations that I give which is entitled 'have we lost the we?' and I, kind of, feel that those times are less possible now. Yes, so Erin was inadvertently part of my finding a place for my politics that were different from hers.

Moderator: Who has inspired you in the past and who inspires you now?

Liz Kelly: Okay. The first time I remember being totally inspired was when I went to the communist university and I took a five-day, five-session course with Bea Campbell on the Women's Liberation Movement. Her way of speaking and her capacity to make political speech almost poetic, and her passion, but then also her ease and capacity of engagement with others I found totally inspiring, and very, very different from my experience of doing politics around the male Left. I would now say the white male Left. I think I didn't-, the whiteness wasn't significant to me at the time, but it certainly is now looking back. She had a grace, an incisiveness and a capacity to connect with others that I just found deeply inspiring, so I would definitely say she was the first person who inspired me, and I feel very lucky that subsequently she became a friend. I think since then I think I've mainly been inspired by black feminism and black feminists. Again, some of whom I've had the pleasure to work with.

I co-chaired the End Violence Against Women Coalition for ten years with Marai Larasi and it's a different mixture of what inspires me about Marai. She has an interesting wry sense of humour that you can miss, because it kind of just is gentle, but also a steeliness about racism, and a sense of history that I think many white people let go of. So, referring back to ancestors

and the things that you hold onto about the place and the people that you've come from. I think I've definitely had periods of time when I felt un-moored from that, and so I have this admiration for this capacity to hold that, at the same time as not telling fairy stories about what living in whatever families we all grew up in was actually like. So, my admiration now, I would say, is for women who can do that complexity but with the grace and incisiveness, you know, that those things are really what draws me to, yes-

Moderator: How do you think women approach leadership and do you think that there is a difference between men's and women's leadership?

Liz Kelly: Not sure that I can say anything about women in that way. I can talk about myself, and I can talk about the conversations that I've had about this. I think for feminists, particularly for radical feminists, this is actually a very fraught issue because part of what our politics and our critique was about, was about power and hierarchy. The more you unpick what that actually means the more you also see issues about class, issues about race, issues about sexuality, that actually leadership comes easily to those who have a sense of entitlement to such positions. So, I think our original commitment and interest, it wasn't just a commitment, we were trying to find ways to not reproduce the very things that we thought were (TC 20.00) what we were critiquing and fighting against. Our understanding of power, I think was one that was fairly critical of it because just all around you could see examples of how it was used not in the interests of the we, but in the interests of the I. So, I think that meant that we had a fairly ambivalent, or actually hugely ambivalent, position about leadership to being with.

Especially here, I think there was more willingness to engage with different ways with it in the US, to think and try to create what they call feminist leadership. I think here it was very fraught, and there were lots of fights and disputes in women's organisations that were about whether you were taking up too much space, whether you were accruing too much power. So, I had a very, very uncertain, uneasy relationship to this idea and it was when I started to do my PhD, and when I started to speak at conferences, and when I realised that I could write a text and find a voice that captured attention and imagination, I got very scared. I got really scared. I can remember the very first time that I spoke and the whole room went silent because they were just with my every word, and I thought, 'Oh my God. This is what fascists do. They get people to this point and then they say the thing. It's terrifying. I don't want this.' So, it was only when I met-, I've had lots of conversations with women about this and about-, but it was only really when I met my lover, who, she died in 2010, that was actually her anniversary two days ago.

When I met her, she was German, working in Switzerland, self defence teacher, younger than me, and had different ways of exploring this issues. She really, really challenged me and she said, 'Actually, we need women like you. I want you to be a feminist professor. We need feminist professors.' I'd been not applying. 'We need women who can use their own power but not for themselves, and if you misuse power, believe me, I'll tell you. But I don't believe that you will.' That was, kind of, a very interesting point at which I thought, 'Okay. I have to stop being so personally tortured by all of this, and what I have to do is find a space and a place where I feel comfortable and where I do have a sense that I'm using power for the we, whatever power I have.' When you do that you do actually end up having benefits that are yours personally.

I think it's about finding your place of what I would call feminist integrity. Then having a reference group, you know, it can be one, it can be more than that, who-, and I have had several women's groups where I've said, 'Okay, if I'm getting too close to the state, or if I'm taking ideas in a direction that you are not sure about I want you to promise that you're going to tell me.' So, having your-, making yourself part of a smaller we, I suppose that is, isn't it? It's actually saying, 'I want to be accountable,' but you can't be accountable to, you know, a movement that has so many tendrils, so you have to find a space of personal accountability, I think, and I have tried to do that in various ways.

Moderator: I think you've touched on this but can you expand on your own leadership style and how you developed that?

Liz Kelly: I don't think I really have one in a conscious way. I think I endeavour to be inclusive. If I'm working in organisations I want the space of decision making and thinking to be as flat as possible, and as engaging as possible with as many people. At the same time, I don't pretend that there aren't lines of power, where ultimately I have a final say about certain things. So, as director of the unit, the women who work here with me, you know, if push comes to shove a final decision about something will have to be taken by me, and I don't pretend that that's not the case. I try my hardest never to have to be in that place. I try my hardest never to have to make someone redundant, for example, to find ways to extend contracts or to enable someone to, if a project's coming to an end and we know we're not going to have any more money, to create space for them to find a next employment.

In the wider sector, chairing the Violence Against Women working group on the Women's Coalition, out of which the End Violence Against Women Coalition grew, I think my style of leadership is to, as my wonderful friend Marai Larasi would say, is to hold space. To create a space in which women think their thoughts and ideas are welcome. To hold space in which just because you are from a very big organisation that has lots of members, doesn't mean you get any more space to speak than a small black women's organisation. If we're in a space together everybody has an equal voice in that space. I think my style of leadership is also one that tries to recognise (TC 30.00) debate and difference. So, not to shut it down, not to pretend it's not there, but also not to make that so central that it's impossible to do anything else.

So, to somehow, yes, to hold the fact that we don't all think the same about certain things and maybe we're not going to resolve that difference, ever, but certainly not today at this meeting where we've got other things that we need to do. So, it's about allowing space for dissent, space for radical politics that actually neither getting things done, nor key political engagements are more important than one another. If you don't have some of the political engagements, what you decide to get done ends up being the wrong thing anyway. One of the things I love about working in a coalition is that we only go forward really clearly and strongly on the things that we know we agree on. We don't insist on agreement. We try to work our way to whatever a consensus position is. So, for example, with EVAW, it literally took us two years to get to a consensus position around prostitution, because there were very different positions in the group. The fact that we got there, and we got there carefully and thoughtfully, I think was actually a really good thing.

Yes, for me leadership-, and I suppose I'm saying there's one thing about holding a space and there's another thing about where it is that you're hoping to get to, what your direction of travel is. I suppose my leadership is I want as many as possible to be on that journey and there when you get to some point that was where you wanted to be in the first place. So, to hold the space and to bring as many women or organisations with you.

Moderator: What motivates you as a leader?

Liz Kelly: Oh God, that's a hard question. That's so interesting that I find it difficult to answer this. I think I'm used to doing the doing and not reflecting so much on it afterwards. I've been motivated in the past by things I passionately wanted to happen. So, shifting the agenda from one that was about domestic violence to violence against women and girls. Trying to get the government to have a policy on violence against women and girls. So, sometimes my motivation is a something that I want to happen, and I try to find others who want the same thing to happen so that we can work together on it. Sometimes my motivation I think is for a way of doing feminism that I know gave me so much as a young woman, and enabled me to become who I am now, which I would never have imagined I-, there is no way on this planet that the idea of being a professor, or even working in a university, was part of my sense of who I was as a young woman. Absolutely not. It's the women's movement and all the women who I've encountered through it that have opened up that path for me. So, my motivation is to invite and welcome women into a different kind of political space, that I want them to feel recognised, to feel seen, to feel heard, even if I don't agree with them, and that their contribution is one that is, yes, welcomed. That's very much I think some of what I do, is that, in that motivation of 'please come and join us'.

Moderator: How would you say your involvement in the sector has impacted on you personally? You have talked about this.

Liz Kelly: I don't know how to answer that question other than to say about everything in my life, pretty much. There's no part of my life that isn't touched by violence against women, by feminism. My work life, I work on the issues of violence against women, and in my personal life, my friends, my reference points, are all connected in some way to the sector. On Friday I was dancing at the 40th anniversary of Southall Black Sisters, so even-, I shouldn't say 'even'. So, I think a lot of people think that if you do this work it's all terrible and traumatic, and there are days when it feels like that, but there are more days I would say where it feels like you're part of something wondrous and that you actually get to experience joy, and that connection that happens between feminists that is really, really special, as in the party. Also, I've got to meet women working on these issues all over the world, and I've got friendships that have begun after I gave a talk at a conference. So, my wonderful spider of feminist friends stretches across the globe.

Then, I would also say that it's also been a challenge as well about how to, as a white woman, unpick, or I usually say 'unpeel', I think of it like an onion, unpeel as many of the layers of racism as I can uncover. So, there's a sense that it creates hard work, that if you're really serious you actually have to go away and do for yourself. Nobody else (TC 40.00) can do it. You have to do it. So, it's also created spaces where I've had to really go away and take serious looks at

myself and find things in myself that I didn't like, but once you find them then you can begin to unpick them.

Moderator: You've said that violence against women and girls is one of the issues that you're passionate about. Are there any others that are dear to your heart, and also how do you think you've influenced change in these areas?

Liz Kelly: Okay. My problem is that I think violence against women and girls touches every other issue, so I can't see it as separate from work around equal pay. It's not separate from women having the right to independence, the right to housing. It's not separate from pensions, because a lot of women will have been controlled, not had their own careers, and so will end up poor. So, for me, it wraps around everything else, or sits in the middle of everything else. So, I care about everything, but I can't do everything. I'm the kind of feminist who thinks, 'Actually, I really love the fact that there's a group of women over there that are working on equal pay.' There's the WASPI women over here working on the inequity of what happened about pensions for women born in the decade that I was born in. That actually we need all of us doing all of those things and collectively we are the movement. It just so happens that violence against women was the issue that caught me and has held me since the 1970s, and that's the sphere that I put my energy into. I find it hard to argue or make claim to influence because I really, really fundamentally believe in the we rather than the I.

Moderator: So, how has coalitions-

Liz Kelly: No, it's okay. I'm not going to-, that's my continued ambivalence about power and leadership, and I have to own it and I have to speak it. At the same time, I know that some of the ideas that came out of my head have been really influential. So, my PhD, the central idea in that is about the continuum of violence, and I think that idea still has purchase. It's been used by the UN. It's been used all over the place, and I think people use it in one sense of its meanings, which is that there's a connection between the everyday intimate intrusions that women experienced at work, on the street, and the more extreme forms of violence. I think what's been less worked with is that-, and I think this is really interesting also in terms of the work that a lot of black feminists are doing at the moment about micro aggressions, that the drip, drip, drip of being treated as less than, constantly, every day, is actually undermining of your capacity. Also, makes daily life a struggle rather than something that you-, yes, so I think that idea is important.

I think the fact that I've always wanted to talk about violence against women and girls in the round rather than domestic violence or sexual violence, has been an important contribution and was the foundation for ERAW and the coalition. That idea has another element to it, which is that it was recognising that increasingly, individual organisations who support women and girls were not able to have a critical voice because of how tightly funding was constructed. And that they needed a space in which they could think critically, but also where there could be a critical engagement with government at all levels, and with other institutions. So, that's the point of ERAW, that ERAW is a space where women's organisations can have a different kind of voice, and we've made the decision a long, long time ago that we would never take any money from government. We're not providing direct services, so we can afford to do that, in order that we

have that autonomy. So, I think that's the idea of EVAW and the creation of EVAW, and how it's grown and developed. I definitely have had a hand in that.

I think I've also had a hand in supporting, enabling, growing new generations of feminist academics, and also women working in the sector. So, several of my ex-PhD students are stunningly smart, fantastic, wonderful women who've taken little pieces of-, not little pieces, ideas of mine and just done-, flown with them and done something really, really exciting and special with them. So, Fiona Vera-Gray, whose book *The Right Amount of Panic*, about how women manage being in public space took this idea I had about how we all do safety work, and has just, you know, she's taken it to an entirely other level. I revel in that. I don't see that as someone stealing. I see it as someone, yes, growing an idea and doing something new and innovative and wonderful with it. On our MA, quite a lot of our graduates end up, not end up, that's the wrong, choose to work in the women's sector. So, I think there's a, kind of, contribution in terms of some kind of continuity but also change of certain foundational ideas (TC 50.00) that need to be held on to, whilst also, of course, times change and one needs to adapt, but actually you need to have some routes for the adaption.

Moderator: How do you think the women's sector as a whole has influenced and changed women's structural position in the UK?

Liz Kelly: It has and it hasn't I think, is my answer to that. I think one can be deeply pessimistic and have data for the gender pay gap and the race pay gap, etc, etc, and those things are all true. But if I think back to when I first became a feminist in the 1970s, a lot of things have changed. I think nothing of going into a pub and sitting there, or a restaurant, and sitting there on my own. It was deeply frowned upon, and actually in some instances, you know, not allowed. So, one of the very first demonstrations that-, I wasn't there, of women's liberationists, was in London at a Wimpy bar that was throwing single women out at ten o'clock at night because they were clearly up to no good. So, a whole group of women, including some wearing nun's costumes I'm told, went and occupied the Wimpy bar. That wouldn't happen now, and we've created, for better or worse, a violence against women sector. The number of services that there are, not all of them are run anymore by feminists, and I think there's positives and negatives of a more extensive and professional rather than professionalised sector. At the same time, I think the inequalities that there are in relation to sex, and then if we add intersectional inequalities of class and race, and sexuality, and disability, all of those things are still deeply embedded in our society. So, I think there have been changes and I think they are changes that I welcome in my life because they are about forms of freedom that I did not have in the early 1970s. But that's not the same as one's structural position in social hierarchies.

Moderator: What do you think are greatest achievements of women's collective action?

Liz Kelly: I think probably one of them is definitely finding a voice, and a public voice. I mean that on multiple levels. Again, I think it's hard if you're a young woman who's growing up now to imagine how confronting of the self it was to go on a public demonstration and shout really loudly, as a woman. That kind of loud, in your face voice was actually, I think, really-, it was difficult for a lot of women to find it. I know some would say, 'Well, maybe this differs by race and class,' but sorry, I grew up in a working class community and

household, and it was not something that would be encouraged or expected. Then, you've got going to nun school in the process. So, certainly good Catholic girls didn't have loud voices. Then, finding other kinds of voice, I think. Learning how to write, write creatively, write academically, write applications for funding, write papers that are trying to persuade politically. There are all kinds of voices that many of us have found at some one, some multiple, and I think that sense of, women have the right to enter whatever field they want to, and they have a right to dream of being the best. I take great pleasure in watching a lot of sport, and I think about all of the women who have achieved greatness in their sporting field, in athletics, in football, in cricket. None of that was there, at all, when I was a young woman.

Moderator: It was a dream.

Liz Kelly: No. So, the fact that so many girls can have different dreams and different ambitions, I think fills me with delight, and I want that to be protected for them going forward. On Sunday I had a little weep when Tanni Grey-Thompson got her lifetime achievement award in sports. She has just been such an incredible inspiration as a woman, as a woman with a disability, but also as a woman with politics and values. So, actually, what you can, or what I see in her, is this rounded person. She's not just her sporting achievement. She's not just her ideas. She's not just her disability. She's not just a mother. She's all these things, and more that I don't know about, clearly. That's one of the things that I think is an achievement, that women can occupy more and bigger space, and spaces, than I definitely thought possible as a young woman.

Moderator: What do you think still needs to be done, and also what are your thoughts on the future of women's rights?

Liz Kelly: I can give a pessimistic and an optimistic answer to that question. The pessimistic answer is that I see, globally, a kind of constellation-, I'm (TC 01.00.00) not saying that they are in cahoots with one another, but a constellation of political leaders and political movements that are anti-feminist. Explicitly, deliberately, horribly anti-feminist. It snakes from the Vatican through the US, Hungary, Russia, and then into all right-wing movements and all fundamentalist movements. What unites them is actually their anti-feminism, and in one sense it might be secular. In another sense it might be religious. It's not the point. They are led by men who are angry at the autonomy that women have managed to carve, in whatever ways they have, in different contexts and different societies. That really frightens me, and it frightens me in particular where those men have got political power, and they can literally roll back women's rights. We're seeing that. We're seeing that happen in a number of places. My optimistic response is that there are huge collective uprisings of women all over the planet.

Not necessarily in the same places as the right-wing men, although in some of those places too. It feels like it would take authoritarianism on a massive scale to silence and quieten those women. What that means, though, is that we're in a time where there's much more overt contestation about these things, that we're not in a time, which maybe we thought we were for a couple of decades, of incremental progress. We're in a time of conflict and contention, and that we're going to have to find ways of holding space with each other in order to face this in a

way that feels like you're definitely part of something bigger, and you're part of something which is going to not be overrun by other powerful forces.

Moderator: Is there anything else that you would like to say?

Liz Kelly: I think the only thing I want to say is that women's liberation, feminism, the women's sector, however we want to describe it, has actually-, it's almost been the architect of my life. I have lived a life that I feel was enriched by the issues that I worked on, the women I worked on them with, women whose work I've read, who have challenged or inspired me, and that there's not much about it that I'd change.

Moderator: Thank you.