

File: Julie Begum 5

Key

[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time

[5:22 IA] = inaudible section at this time

word = best guess at word

... = interruption in sentence, trailing off or short pause

Growing up in Globe Town, in the East End, where I did, it was never really a safe place. There was high levels of racial attacks and violence. It's a terrifying experience to come across someone who hated you so much that they would want to beat you up for that really. We had skinheads wandering around East London beating people up and killing them and getting away with it. Altab Ali's murder in 1978 mobilised lots of people into thinking that this wasn't really ... acceptable. As a result, thousands of Bengalis and non-Bengalis got together to organise protests and demonstrations and actually led a demonstration to Downing Street with Altab Ali's coffin. That was the beginning of young men realising that they weren't going to accept this kind of treatment anymore. Also there was a frustration from a lot of women who felt excluded from the anti-racist, anti-fascist movement. There was always the same men at the same meetings making the same statements. As women we decided that we wanted to make meetings accessible for women to attend, for girls to attend. Often the voices of women are very absent in these movements. We had a conference to see if there was a mandate for that kind of work and when hundreds of women attended, we just felt we needed to do something, to be active in the movement on our own terms. So we decided that we would do it in a collective way, that we would have rotation of people speaking at meetings, it wouldn't be this cult of leadership that was often seen at events. We made sure that meetings had childcare provision, and so that's what we did. I remember the Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, where the police were there trying to separate the groups from each other and we knew that they would go after young men, so myself and others got in front of the young men who were being set-on by dogs with the police. It would have been harder for them to put their dogs on us.

I'm the oldest in my family and I remember doing the same thing with my brothers on the way to school, when people would set their dogs on us, and I couldn't just ... not get involved and not say something, and to remain silent and stand by. It's just not part of my nature I think. When the British National Party put forward a candidate for the local elections and actually won. The reason for that was people were literally terrified of voting. We wanted to escort women to polling stations so they could vote. Well Labour got in, Beackon was defeated and our job was done really. It was amazing. It was euphoric. And I think there was a sense of jubilation. We were right to stand up for ourselves.

<End of interview>