From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Yvonne Taylor	**Date:09/12/2019** **Age:** 60
Key issues: Racism. Diversity. Lesbian. Army. MI6. Windrush. Systematic. Women's Centre. Rebel Dykes. Squatting. S&M Dykes. Club Nights. Lesbian Erasure.	
Narrative summary Yvonne was born in Nottingham in 1959 to Jamaican parents. When she was seven her mother left so her step-father was left to bring up Yvonne and his 5 other children. She learnt very quickly about racism and how to find her way around it; using peoples' ignorance and prejudice against them. Yvonne was aware of her sexuality from about the age of eleven. After school and college, she decided to join the army as a way of leaving home as well as being attracted by rumours of lesbians. She became the army fencing champion which changed the power dynamics. She became a clerk/PA to some of the officers. She also began working for MI6, collating information. She found the army difficult in terms of her experimenting with her sexuality; she was quite lonely as many of the white women were dismissive of her. She went to work at the Ministry of Defence in Pall Mall during the time of Windrush; she talks of the racism she experienced whilst there. After she left the army she moved to Brighton because the woman she was seeing lived there. However, she talks of how she never really fitted in. She talks about the women's centre there that was mainly run by separatist lesbian feminists; who she did not agree with. She moved back to London and set up a club called Systematic, with three other women, at the Women's Centre in Brixton. Systematic became a community club for mainly lesbian women; it had a café, a games room and a club room. Yvonne talks of how Systematic was a godsend for many women of ethnic minorities. Yvonne talks about Rebel Dykes – a group that had a load of fetish clubs that many other lesbians and feminists did not agree with. Yvonne DJ'ed for one of their S&M parties at Ovalhouse – many lesbians were outside the venue protesting the event. Yvonne feels that nobody should be told what they can and can't do – as long as it's consensual.. She talks of how many of the Rebel Dykes were far more caring and welcoming than the lesbian feminists at the women's centre. After Systematic Yvonne worked for Lambeth Council for the single homeless project. She also worked for Homeless Action. After that she got into hospitality and has been in the business for the past twenty years; in bars, clubs, restaurants and cafes. She runs club nights. She talks about how to create a great club night, and she talks about her own experiences of attending clubs as well as running them. She feels diversity is crucial in club spaces; she believes it is a way of educating people about their differences. She talks about lesbian erasure – even with younger lesbians' ignorance towards lesbian history and the lesbians who came before them. She says that 'we are being written out of history as we speak 'by our own community. She also talks about the current problems of racism and homophobia that people in the UK are facing; with things reverting to how they were when she was young. For Yvonne, what really matters is trying to break down divisions.	
	Length of interview: 2 hrs

Evelyn: This is an interview for From A Whisper To A Roar, an oral history project conducted by Opening Doors London, and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Today is the 9th of December, 2019, and I'm interviewing the formidable Yvonne Taylor.

Yvonne: Formidable.

Evelyn: Could you start by telling me a little bit about your early life and how you came to an understanding of who you really are?

Yvonne: Well, I was born in 1959 in Nottingham, which is in the East Midlands. I was born to Jamaican parents and I am the oldest of six children that were brought up together, I will say, because I have other siblings. I was brought up by my mum and my stepfather, who was black Jamaican too. Lived in Nottingham, and my first recollection of living in a house, as I remember it, was in a street where they still had those signs. "No blacks, no dogs, no Irish."

We lived in a street with mostly Caribbean people, at the time we were being called West Indians and we lived in a house that was shared with two other families, so basically we had a little kitchenette and two rooms. That was it, basically.

I grew up and then when I was aged seven, my mum left. She went off to get some fish and chips. We were waiting at home for lunch and she never came back and then life changed dramatically for us because of that. Then my stepfather was bringing up his five kids and myself, by himself.

Evelyn: Tough.

Yvonne: Yes, and trying to hold down a job. One of his friends used to look after us around the school thing. But after about six months, the three youngest siblings were taken into care, mainly because Social Services figured that he couldn't look after us. I thought to myself, at the time, I was like, "Wow." I was quite happy when my mum left, she wasn't very nice to me. She had her own issues. Now, in retrospect, I look at it and think she probably had postnatal depression, because... But, we had Social Services come to the house a couple times, primarily because I was deemed difficult at nursery school because I wouldn't drink my milk, and they'd make me drink the milk and I would throw it up, so they considered that me being a rebel. Hello, I'm just lactose int...

Anyway, when she left it was, for me, probably the best thing that happened really, because she would have probably ended up killing me, because that's just the way she was. I was like a punch bag. But she left, and then my stepfather met my soon-to-be stepmother, who was white, lower-middle class, owned her own house, was probably about 10 years older than him, and had two grown-up sons. One was a session musician for rock bands and lived in this hippie commune across the road and he looked like John Lennon but he had ginger hair, he had the same specs and everything. Chris was the oldest one, so he was 19, and my other stepbrother, David, was a teddy boy.

For me, I guess for all of us, but more for me, it was a complete cultural switch over, because I'd been brought up in this Caribbean household where Sunday dinner meant that you got rice and peas, chicken curry or something. Suddenly, I was in this house where we were having tea, which meant things like salad and cold stuff and tomatoes. Cakes were good. We had tinned ham and stuff. It was a very...

Yeah, by the time I got to nine, my life really changed. Of course, I'd been to school ..nursery school and school. I played chess in my junior school, Arkwright School, but I couldn't read or write, and nobody actually noticed that until my stepmother came along. With her and the last teacher I had my last two years in junior school. Between them I ended up in a class where none of us could read or write, but this teacher, Mr. Parker-he's now passed, bless him, but he was on his last legs anyway. He was given 25 kids that were deemed

dumb, and at the end of that two years, he managed to get 11 of those kids to pass their 11-plus with flying colours.

Evelyn: Fantastic. It wasn't easy in those days.

Yvonne: No. That got me into grammar school, which I never went to. I went to a secondary school. It was a bilateral. Don't know if anybody remembers bilateral schools, but I think it was a Labour thing, where they had the streams. Yeah, I didn't really go to grammar school because it was really posh. Those kids were always getting beaten up and shit, so I was like, "No, I'm not going to go there."

I ended up going to this Norman Green School, where I did quite well. I got there at 11 until I was 13, I'd done my O level English.

Evelyn: That was well ahead of time.

Yvonne: Yeah, and then after that, everything went downhill, because they chose my subjects for me. What did I get? Needlework, cookery classes, all the stuff I was not in the least bit interested in whatsoever.

I went to school and I learnt more about people, is what I'm going to say about my education. My stepbrother, Chris, was a major influence on weaving the minefield of being a young black kid in this predominantly white society, at the time. And I think if it hadn't been for him, I'm not sure I'd still be here today, talking about it, so it's like even though my mum left and it should have been really traumatic, it probably was the best thing she ever did for her kids, because ...

Evelyn: She wasn't coping.

Yvonne: Yeah, and where would we be now? I'm not sure, so yeah.

She went off to America to live with her mum, my grandmother. Who was also born in Jamaica, but had one child, my mum. And lived with, I don't think she's married to him, but she had my mum's dad, who I never met. They didn't get on. She just saved up her money, this is my grandmother, and left, and came to the UK. And ended up in the West Midlands running brothels, believe it or not. But left my mum ...

Evelyn: Bit of a character, then.

Yvonne: Yeah, she's definitely a bit of a character. She was probably, by all things, quite good at what she did. She made a lot of money, anyway. That's what I understand.

But she left her daughter, her only child, out in Jamaica where from all accounts, people weren't really very nice to her. I gather that she was sexually abused, she was mistreated. She ends up being pregnant and had a child, so that was my oldest half-brother. She had this child, and then her mum sent for her. She didn't tell anybody that she had this ticket. She left the son with a babysitter, and claimed she was going to the movies, and never went back.

I had this older brother which I've subsequently met, but he stayed with the babysitter until his mum remembered that she'd got a son. And actually, she

didn't really remember. She went to Jamaica, to visit family and the babysitter recognised her in the street.

Evelyn: Oh my days.

Yvonne: Yeah, so it was like she clearly wasn't very well. And then she came to England and met somebody on the boat, I believe, and had another child whose father I don't know anything about, but so at least two older half-brothers.

And then she met my dad, who was this Jamaican bit of a playboy-come-gangster. At one time, he was one of the biggest gangsters in Brixton. He's passed now, so I can say that.

Evelyn: That's pretty big, actually.

Yvonne: Yeah, but in a way ... I'll come back to him, but that's the background. Essentially, there's me and then there's the five siblings that my mum and my stepfather had together, but we've always grown up ...

Evelyn: Pulled together as a whole six ... [crosstalk 00:10:23]

Yvonne: Yeah, we're just brothers and sisters. That's how it stays. Yeah, I've got five younger siblings, and because of the ... Especially with the three oldest ones, we were tight, because it was a minefield, negotiating mostly my mum, who was not very nice to my stepfather, also. He put up with a lot, he worked hard, he kept us in food and clothing. She tried to spend most of it on gambling and other men, so it was a difficult upbringing.

But for me, from an early age, I learnt that adults are a bit of a minefield, and so I learnt to navigate that, and those skills are still with me, help me to deal with the whole issue of racism. I didn't really get bullied at school because I found out that I was quite good at, like, "Well, if they think I'm going to kill them, just let them think that."

I can't bear violence. I was never going to go home with my clothes all torn and ripped up, because that was the death sentence. So I was one of those kids where I learnt very quickly that, yes, racism was there, and I can either lie down and play the victim or I could find a way around it. So I did. Just used peoples' ignorance to ...

Evelyn: Use their prejudices against them.

Yvonne: Yeah.

Evelyn: They made assumptions about you, and you didn't ...

Yvonne: And my stepbrother ... By the time I was nine, like I said, we were living in this nice bohemian street we had. We had this gay man, Albert Brown, part of the community. It was a street where it was black and white people with varying degrees of wealth and not wealth, and we had a gypsy family that moved in the house next door.

Albert Brown, the gay man, who was a very Quinton Crisp character, and he was ... I grew up with memories of how this flamboyant gay man was looked

after by the community. Of course, obviously there were lots of people who would try to take the piss out of him, and he'd get the last bus home. Bus garage is around the corner from where he lived. Dad was one of those bus drivers, and they used to walk him home, make sure he got to his house, so I had all of those positive experiences.

And I also remember meeting my first transgender person. It was in the days they had to live for a whole whatever year ...

Evelyn: Two years, or whatever it was.

Yvonne: Yeah. And this individual was just ... They walked around the street still with their Adam's apple, having to live with all of that, people looking ...

Evelyn: But wearing the dress and ...

Yvonne: Yeah and, again, another person that was ... I come from a community where I'm not saying there's no prejudice, because there definitely was, but there was boundaries set about. We had an Asian family from India that had the corner shop, and we had the Chinese takeaway, Indian takeaway. It was like early days of different groups of people living together.

Anyway, like I said, when my mum left, it was the start of a completely new life for me. I got into this whole thing of, if I dress us all up at Christmas and Easter and go around to the local factory and catch all those drunk white people, they'd be patting me on the head. You want to pat me on the head, you're going to have to pay for that privilege, so I was very ... What's the word? Inventive about how to work that whole thing, so I was quite wealthy as a little kid.

And the hippie commune across the road, my job was to go and wake them up in the morning. You tried to wake up a bunch of smack heads that have been tripping all night? It paid me well, and they looked after me, and they taught me some life skills, so it all panned out fairly easily.

But, again, navigating a white stepmother, who I wouldn't call mum for a long time, mainly because I mothered myself ... And then I think what happened really was, even from an early age, I would say from about the age of five, I realised that adults were a bit complicated and a little bit weird, a little bit like being lied. They're all a bit angry. There was a lot of angry, black men around me at the time, as well. These people in the house that used to beat up on their partners and their kids and all that sort of thing.

Evelyn: Why do you think there was that anger?

Yvonne: I think they got off a boat. They came here, supposedly, to ...

Evelyn: To find a better life when they got here.

Yvonne: It wasn't a better life. In Nottingham, people came there to work in their family's shoes depots and the cigarette factories. Obviously nursing and stuff like that, but yeah, they weren't treated well. And so I've still got memories of that trauma and seeing how black men couldn't get jobs. They were mostly abused a lot. So, that anger filtered through to their family. I mean I have to

say my stepdad wasn't one of those. If it weren't for him we probably would be dead by now.

That's kind of the back ground. We moved to my stepmother and stayed there and then we moved somewhere else. But we were always together and when the three youngest were taken in care, they were there for about two or three years. That was traumatic for them I think. They were in the middle of the countryside, you know they were nice enough people it was just that they'd got no training about putting cream on kids bodies and dealing with their hair and stuff like that. It was miles away, we had to drive for hours to get to them.

We used to go and visit them twice a month. My dad was keen that we kept in touch. Eventually they came home and we did the usual sibling survival as children. I think I can honestly say from the age of five, I just knew, whatever the expectations for me as an adult just weren't going to happen. That I was going to have to leave and that's what I did.

I stayed in Nottingham till I left school at fifteen and then did a nursery nursing course for two years. With the idea of becoming a nanny or a private nanny. I passed that course with flying colours. Just all white people on it - the ones that were going to be doing the lady magazine jobs. And so I went for my first job in this neighbourhood called the Park, which is like a gated, posh community and I mean posh. I went for this interview, met the kids, got a start date. The day I started, I got introduced to the concept of a utility room. I was expected to do the washing, ironing and look after these two kids and walk their big Dulux St. Bernard dog. I lasted two days, thought it's not for me, that's not what I trained to do.

And then decided to join the Army. Because, it was a legitimate way of leaving home without pissing everybody off. Also it meant that I had a safe, secure, accommodation. Because in those days there was a lot of people just ran away from home and it didn't get them very far. It just got them out of one frying pan into another. I just thought "I'm not doing that", so I joined the Army. Not because I was particularly enamoured with doing it but I wasn't going to university and I wasn't going to end up working in Boots the factory or a cigarette factory or any factory. I did six weeks at Boots factory, before I started college and I didn't even manage to make the six weeks. Monotonous, boring, brain killing, I just wasn't cut out for it.

Evelyn: So what sort of opportunities did the Army give you?

Yvonne: Well they gave me the opportunity to leave home and get into safe accommodation. Get fed everyday, get paid for it. But actually when I joined there were not many black people in and most of those that were there were from the Commonwealth. I wouldn't say that we were the first, but when I joined up there was me and one other black woman. They just assumed, she was from, her dad was an ambassador, what do they call it? Some Government official and they lived in Raynes Park. She had something like twenty five O Levels. She had short hand writing and spoke eight languages, we had nothing in common. Put us in the same room, that didn't work out. My stepbrother had said to me "if you're going to do this, you're going to have to be smarter than them, be way ahead of them", so that's what I did. I made myself the poster girl. They recruited me as an athlete, I used to be an athlete.

Evelyn: What was your sport?

Yvonne: I was a sprinter. I hated it. It wasn't really for me but it was something to do. When I got there I thought, I don't really want to do this running lark and so I had to go for six weeks training. I just had to be one step ahead of them because obviously some of the NCO's were a bit like thinking it was okay to make racist remarks and stuff like that. So, my first six weeks were a bit of a nightmare, but I stuck it out and I learnt how to make that racism work for me.

Evelyn: How did you do that?

Yvonne: Well I said I didn't want to run. I volunteered to go on a fencing course because it was a month off work, turns out I was really good at it. It was probably the best thing I did because it's a posh sport.

Evelyn: Definitely.

Yvonne: It just meant that I got loads of time off work and I became the army champion and it was quite long, it kind of changed the power dynamics.

Evelyn: Because you were a champion.

Yvonne: So, after my training I went to Mill Hill to be a postie. They had there own post office at Mill Hill.

Evelyn: Right. Within the Army?

Yvonne: Yeah. There was a base at Mill Hill so they sent me there and I thought, I'm allergic to dust and the place was just dust, dust, dust so I had to change. So I chose to become a clerk, but effectively I became a PA, to officers and I realized they were even dumber than most of us. Spoilt kids who didn't really know what they were doing and it turns out I was able to get them out of so many fixes, they didn't know how to pay bills. They didn't know how to look after themselves. So I thought right I can make this work for me and I did so the officers kind of liked me. They used to do things like I've got a flat, in such and such a place if you want to get the keys. Go for the weekend. So yeah, I became very popular with the officers especially while I was in England.

Obviously then I changed my career. They made me go back to Guildford, which was not a good place for me but anyway. The army, kind of …It was the place for me to learn to be an adult in society and also by the time I'd got there, one of the other reasons I'd joined was because there was obviously scandals about these lesbians that were getting thrown out of the Army, in the News of the World or something.

Evelyn: So, when did you recognize your first kind of, same sex attraction?

Yvonne: I knew that all along. I think probably I was about eleven. But my parents funnily enough, they knew, they though there was something odd about me. They said they always knew. So, yeah probably from the age of about eleven. I used to watch The Avengers.

Evelyn: Didn't we all.

Yvonne: I used to have this massive crush on Honor Blackman.

Evelyn: That was one of the earliest, where there was a powerful woman, on a TV series who had her own agency and back then. She was out there… dominating.

Yvonne: I think even as a young child I wouldn't play those games you play you know, doctors and nurses. I always played the character of the doctor, the chief you know, I was never the nurse or anything that seemed at the time to me a bit subservient because the power seemed to be with these men. I look back on that and think that was a bit odd but hey, because it meant I had to have a girlfriend or a wife. And we had to kiss.

Evelyn: The shape of things to come.

Yvonne: By the time I was fourteen, I had a step grandmother, a white step grandmother, who couldn't cook. Apart from cakes and lived in [inaudible 00:25:19], which was not my favourite place and also went to church on Sundays, which is something I hated doing. But I used to go and spend a lot of time with her, in my teenage years. So apparently my parents spoke to her and said "what about Yvonne, she doesn't seem to really like boys", and all that sort of thing. So I came out to my step grandmother, who then immediately told them. So, they knew I was then.

When I joined the Army it was a way of experimenting with that sexuality. It didn't go down great, though, because those white girls just assumed I was straight, weren't very comfortable around black people per se. I was pretty much lonely at that time. The officers were much better around the race thing because most of them probably had experience, out of Africa experience, got money invested in a lot of these foreign countries.

Evelyn: They weren't so parochial and only surrounded by other white people.

Yvonne: Yeah so, when you think about the Army, they were recruiting from poor neighbourhoods. When I changed from the postie to the clerk, my first posting was to Ireland. So, when I was nineteen they sent me there. Then I worked for the Intelligence Service and that was kind of like a wake up. I just worked in this basement with all these other Army personnel and we wore civilian clothes. It was MI6 it wasn't MI5 and they had dossiers on, my God they had dossiers, because my job was to collate information. You know they had files on the Redgrave families, we were in Ireland, what the hell? You know, the tennis player Buster Mottram, he was high up in the BNP. So I learnt all this stuff about the real world if you like.

Evelyn: The hidden world in some ways.

Yvonne: The hidden world yeah. Obviously when I went to Ireland, we'd heard the stories about Ireland, depending which paper you read. Like saying the Catholics were devils. Ireland was not my favourite posting but what I did learn, while I was there was about politics and how-

Evelyn: Were you based in the North?

Yvonne: Yeah I was in Lisbon. So I went to Lisbon and as a postie I was able to use the race card to my advantage because all the Irish people, Catholic or Protestants

just assumed I was a student. And actually that's what it said on my passport. So I was able to navigate all of that sort of stuff in Ireland. I used to go to a gym that was run by, Mary Peters, who was like a 1972 World Champion. And, the person that taught me the fencing was Captain Jim Fox who was also an Olympic fencing medallist. So I kind of had this strange relationship with Ireland that I was able to, pretty much go places that most of them lot weren't able to go.

And then from there I went to Germany. Where I worked for Civil Senior officers Brigadiers, Generals. First of all they weren't used to having women and a black woman. I mean most of them I broke down but I had one guy that was not very nice to me. So I wasn't very nice to him. My responsibility while I was there was looking after secret documents and so I had to get them in and get them signed for. And he used to trot off with these documents, so this one day I thought, you know what I'm just going to call the guards and tell them to stop him because he's got these documents and he shouldn't have them. Turns out I helped them discover a sleeper.

Evelyn: Ooh!

Yvonne: I didn't have a clue that's what he was doing. As a result of that I was offered a British Empire Medal, at which point I just went "Yeah, no thanks". That was in 1980, 79, 80. 1980. Then I left Germany and came back to England. I got a posting to the barracks on the Kings Road. A colleague of mine, a smart guy, he'd got a posting and gone two months ahead. He rang me up one day and said "they're going to cancel your posting and I think it's my fault". So I said "what do you mean, it's your fault?" He said "Well they were asking me about you and I just said she's a sweet, cool, black chick, you know she's really funny." That was it. Posting's cancelled.

So I was in limbo for the last two years. They cancelled my posting so I had to go and work at Ministry of Defense in Pall Mall. It was full of civil servants that treated me like a… it was just awful. Then I came back to Guildford, I don't have pleasant memories of that, racism reared its ugly head big time. And it was at the time of Windrush, the first lot of you know

Yvonne: [inaudible 00:31:00], of which, obviously my... well, my dad, and so I had to tell him that he needed to get naturalisation papers. So there was no... It wasn't like the message was getting out to people-

Evelyn: No.

Yvonne: ... that you needed to do X, Y and Z. And this is when I first got political on my own because all the Commonwealth people that were there, they were simply told they had to pay for this passport. And I was like, "This woman has been here for 22 years. She can't get a commission if she doesn't get a passport. But why has she got to pay for it? She did 22 years service for you."

Evelyn: So for the purposes of people maybe listening in the future who don't know much, just briefly explain what Windrush was.

Yvonne: The Windrush thing was about the Conservatives bringing in a law that said if you wanted to remain in this country you had to basically buy a British passport.

Evelyn: Because a whole group of people who had come from the Caribbean in the '50s, that the British had asked, invited to come here and help rebuild after the war.

Yvonne: Yeah. They'd been invited to come here after the war. Yeah.

Evelyn: And then suddenly, 20 years later, they're demanding them to pay for becoming citizens.

Yvonne: Exactly. So, if I think about my parents I just go, "I'm now 20 something and my dad's been here all of this time, paid his taxes, always worked, and now you're telling him he's got to pay to be a British citizen or get deported". I mean, he bought his, but there are lots of people that that message would never have filtered down to. And clearly now we're seeing the effects of that.

Evelyn: Recently people have been deported who've been here for 30 and 40 years.

Yvonne: People have been, yeah. And I'm like, "Really? It's taken you all this time to come up with it?" What was that about? I mean, obviously I live in London, so I kind of go, "Hang on a minute, we've got great swathes of Australians and Kiwis and South Africans that are coming in on dual passports." And technically, most of our blinking parents and they would have been able to claim some British... My step-father's father was a British slaver, come from a British slave-owning family. His mom worked in a big house and he's the result of rape. And so he couldn't get... he had to apply for his British passport. Yeah, so for me it was the last straw. That and the Falkland War. I didn't even know where The Falklands is. So yeah, those two things kind of meant... and along with increasing levels of racism. I was promoted quite quickly.

Evelyn: So we're talking mid-'80s now? Falklands War was '80... Oh no, '80-

Yvonne: It was 1980, '81, I think, yeah.

Evelyn: '81. Early eighties.

Yvonne: Yeah, there was a lot of things that happened in those last two years for me. I was just depressed and isolated and my senior NCOs just were so, "Why's she here, what's she doing?" There was a lot of that. And it got that eventually I just handed my notice in and when I left, I wasn't even afforded the usual things. Company officers got to sign you off. They weren't even there, they left some young girl to give me my paperwork. So I never signed the Official Secrets Act and I never signed... Also, they wanted me to join the Reserves and I was like, "No." So there was a lot of things like... I'd like to tell a story about my time on the island. There's nothing they could do about it because I've never signed the Official Secrets Act.

But after that whole Windrush thing, I was like... When I came to London and they cancelled my posting, my boss was a woman from Mauritius and she'd done 22 years and I was like, "Why would you want to pay for a British passport?" Because her next rise up the ranks was to become an officer and when you've done 22 years and they're asking you to pay hundreds of pounds for a passport... A bit like the Gurkhas, they were always there doing the protection stuff. They've got the menu, we used to have Nasi Goreng on the menu once a week. We only ever saw the Gurkhas when you had a high profile visit and they never got any citizenship, so it's like... I don't know how much it's changed, but

definitely at the time it was like... The battle was for me, was like, "Don't let them get you down." But my last two years, with the Windrush thing, I was like that. And none of the black people were... we were all so... seemed so grateful just to be where they were. And I'm like, "They're not treating you right!"

So that was my first political foray into challenging the politics and the racism. And yeah, then I left.

Evelyn: What did you move on to?

Yvonne: Well, I left and I went to Brighton. I didn't really have any plans, just moved to Brighton. I was seeing this woman there. Didn't really work out because I'm not the stereotype. I don't do DIY. I wear trousers and jeans but I'm more likely to go for a manicure and pedicure.

Evelyn: Okay.

Yvonne: Yeah. I'd say I didn't really sort of fit in and also I couldn't really get a job in Brighton. Because at the time you used to do interviews over the phone and they'd say, "Come along," and we'd have a little chat and of course I sound like proper English and then I'd get there and they'd say, "Oh sorry, job's gone." So I got a job as a traffic warden for my last six months and yeah, I thought, "No, this is not for me." It was at a time when they... the Brighton Bombings, the Grand Hotel and-

Evelyn: Yeah. Thatcher. They had Thatcher in their conference.

Yvonne: How did you actually miss the one twat that you should have got? And also, the whole... obviously they had a Women's Centre down there and it kind of really wasn't for me because it... It's not that I don't believe in the politics of it all, but I'm just kind of going, "Just because I'm gay, I've got to listen to crap music, wear funny clothes and make some statement or not really like men or all of this," and it just felt too simplistic for me. And also-

Evelyn: Was that dominated by feminists at the time? Second wave feminists, in the Women's Centre?

Yvonne: Yeah. And for me, I was kind of going, "I'm finding this a bit sort of not the way forward." I mean, I know there was stuff to work on, but I didn’t think, it was a way forward for me. Because I'm like, "Seriously? It sounds like one of them scenarios where you want to have all the male children done away with."

Evelyn: This was the separatists, who wouldn't have anything to do with boys over the age of 10.

Yvonne: Yeah, and all of that. It just baffles me. And I just thought, and also some of the feminists at the time, I think... What was her name? [Liebovich 00:38:43], was it? I don't even know. Somebody was spouting something from one of these American things and I thought, "Why do these people just sound like right-wing, evangelical lesbians?" Right, and they have their right to their thought processes but why are we all basing... some of the feminists at the time were all basing some of their stuff on what I thought was a bit of right-wing rhetoric dressed up as something else.

Then I came across these three... Well, I was dating this really posh white woman, whose name I can't mention, but she had two degrees, played the harp. She'd been to Oxford and Cambridge and her mum lived in Eccleston Square, I remember that very well, in a protected rented apartment, and she was a bit of a rebel. Greenham Common rebel. And she was kind of the first person that kind of "got it." She took me around to a whole different sort of side of London which didn't involve going to The Fallen Angel or any of those awful pubs that they were calling lesbian pubs. You know, people just got drunk and got into fights. And then I start running this club, Systematic, with these three other women.

Evelyn: And where was that based?

Yvonne: That was at the Women's Centre in Brixton.

Evelyn: Okay.

Yvonne: So when I came, I used to go there and I felt a bit over overdressed, a bit like...

Evelyn: So paint us a picture of walking into the Women's Centre in Brixton.

Yvonne: Yeah, so I walk into that Women's Centre and it's run mostly by strongly opinionated feminists. They were very welcoming but I probably paid far too much for a pair of jeans or a pair of trainers and they had a thing about poverty and why would I feel that it was okay to spend 30 quid on a pair of Levi jeans.

Evelyn: So they questioned what you wore and how much you'd spend?

Yvonne: Yeah. So because of what I wore and... Because I remember them trying to get me to go to Greenham Common and I'm like, "No offense. I'm not a camper. Even when I was in the army I was... I went on a night exercise, I was fucking useless. I don't... I'm not an outdoorsy kind of person. I like a bed, I like a bath. I'm sorry about it. Not sorry about it." So there was a bit of conflict in that.

Then one day, when I went to this meeting about... This posh white woman, middle class woman, takes me to a dinner party where there were three other black women, in Kennington and they were coming up... well, one particular person was coming up with this club that they wanted to run. And I know there'd been other such clubs, or parties in people's houses, but mostly they were dark and they were moody and they were mostly black women with a few white women that were confused about who they were, and it just had a lot of angry energy and so we wanted to change that.

And so I went and said, "Can we use the new centre?" So, for 20 quid we got the whole building. And in time we had a café space, some pool tables, a game room upstairs and this sound-proofed hall thing right next to the timber yard. Well, it was their building, I think. And people were having parties but again they just transported the party into the room and it was so dark, you couldn't really see anything. And I said, "I'm only prepared to do this if all women are welcome," and that's what we did. We ran Systematic for about eight years in a south London Women's Centre.

Evelyn: Was it dark in there or... how did you change it?

Yvonne: Oh yeah. We changed it. We made it into much more of a community thing. So you came in, the café was lit but it wasn't dark and you could get food and it was somewhere you could go and buy your drinks instead of having to clamber into the main room and find who was selling the drinks. Yeah, in those days we didn't have a license or anything. I don't think the Women's Centre had a license. We bought everything and cooked the food, made the café respectable, made the games room more appealing and then made the club room look like a club room so we could see each other. And we played a whole variety of music so we didn't have to listen to pop music. So we played old school soul, Aretha Franklin, anything that was rare groove, reggae, lover's rock.

So, basically, everyone was welcome. *We had this whole room full of a diverse group of women who, for a minute, were united about the music*. We didn't have any fights. People came in with a great deal of respect for the people who were running it because we made it clear that, "This is not how it's going down." And yeah, it was popular for a very long time. I mean, yeah, anybody that went there at the time, especially for women from the ethnic minorities, it was a bit of a godsend because for people that were arriving from different parts of the U.K., it was probably their first encounter to see so many other black women or Asian women and yeah, probably.

Evelyn: Was there something in the choice of music? What made it so welcoming for all those different women?

Yvonne: Well, I think mainly because it wasn't about... We tried not to make it really about politics, but about, "God, can you take a night off and go..." But it was about politics because in a way it was a lot about... There was obviously some people there that were just there for the dance but, like I said, we had the rebel dykes, we had all these feminists that wouldn't normally go out and party, so to speak. I don't really know. I think it came from us as promoters having a clear vision. Like if you turned up in your leather suit, like Avi, or your studded belt or your black leather cap or whatever it was, we weren't going to be throwing you out or giving you a lecture about this, that and the other.

So it meant it was a space where, if you were new to London, it... actually, as we've realised over the years, it was a safe space to come to. Went to The Fallen Angel, it was like, you'd get some oaf that was really drunk, trying to chat you up but spilling your drink all over you, or there'd be some fight. It was very much a white, butch thing, but not in the way that I understood butch, because it's... I went to Gateways because when I was in the army, it was one of my first clubs, went to Gateways. I was baffled by it but it seemed a lot more interesting, a bit more realistic. And then I went to The Sol's Arms, which was a pub in Camden, which a lot of people have forgotten about, but when I was in the army I took two friends there and they were like... yeah.

Evelyn: Was it a gay pub? Or was it women?

Yvonne: No, it was just a general pub but on the weekend there's nobody in Euston or sort of-

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Around that area.

Yvonne: ... in that area. There's nobody there, so it was one of those bars that at the weekends it was like a club, a women's club.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yvonne: And it was always busy and it had an interesting array of people and less fights but it was very much old school. So yeah, I wouldn't have taken my sisters there or anything like that. Whereas the party we did in Brixton, my sisters did come down.

Evelyn: Did you have a mix of straight and-

Yvonne: No, I would say it was probably 95% lesbian. Well, at least that's what we thought they were at the time, with a handful of sort of bisexual women and then probably 1% of confused people who latched onto the politics of feminism but weren't really anything, they were just asexual. Which was also fine. I mean, for me it was like, as long as you came, you had a good time and you left safely then that's really all that mattered at the time.

I mean, I did run a club when I was in the army. I managed to bribe some guards at an empty barracks. The [inaudible 00:47:55] lived on so that we could get people in the door and I had this access to this Sergeants' Mess so I used to run a party there once a month.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Yvonne: And whilst it wasn't my type of people, it had kind of been... it was just really cool. It'd got a proper bar and loads of space, there was a glitter ball. Yeah. So I realised that was my forte.

Evelyn: So that was another thing that the army gave you.

Yvonne: Well yeah, I think-

Evelyn: Kind of window into the future of... As a party girl, the entrepreneur.

Yvonne: I think so, yeah. And, well, that wasn’t just entrepreneurship. I mean, in fairness, when we did the Women's Centre, we did make money. We were charging people five pounds to come in, 200 people coming in, I mean, we were always busy. We got our own beer. We made our own food. So yeah, we didn't make that much, but yeah.

Evelyn: You weren't millionaires. You were making a living.

Yvonne: Making a living, yeah. I think that that was partly instrumental in changing the way that the women's scene then followed on from... because up until that point there were other people doing these what we call shebeens but like I said, they were in dark rooms, people's houses, you couldn't really see anybody. And I'm not knocking them, but what I'm saying is I kind of wanted to, well we kind of wanted, to stretch it out because we had white friends and white male friends and white female friends, Asian friends. And I wanted a space, well we all wanted a space, where everybody felt welcome. Age wasn't really a barrier so we got quite a lot of...quite a real age range. There were some people in there that probably were far too young to be in the space but for me... and I've

met a few of those people since who've said that, "To be quite honest with you, it helped us to kind of grow up and kind of have these responsible people going, 'Yeah, you can't just rock up at the club and get angry and start fighting. It's not the way'."

So there's a lot of things that came out of running that club, for me. It's only in the last sort of 10 years when people have come up to me and said, "Oh my god, I really miss that club". Because it was the place... I mean, if you were white and 18, a young guy or a punk, you probably would have ended up at The Bell in King's Cross, which was, quite frankly, it was fine but it was the home where all the homeless people ended up, arriving at King's Cross and they would go to The Bell and for me, a lot of those young people were really vulnerable and really exploited, so I didn't really... And I was always overdressed for The Bell, always.

I mean, the thing about Systematic was, this is how I met the Rebel Dykes. And I'm not saying they were perfect, because they kind of were a car crash at some times, but they were the friendliest car crashing white people that I met when I was there. Yes, they had green hair and they were punks and they were this, that and the other. They didn't really have proper jobs and they squatted and all that, but probably the most comfortable time I had, in the beginning of arriving here, came out of being in that Women's Centre, which was run by this collective of women who had varying opinions about myself, mainly because I was quite controversial because... We were talking about equal opportunities in this, that and the other and I'm like, "I'm not being funny, but when did the Turkish people start calling themselves black?" And then, obviously I was young, because I was like, "I lived in Wood Green, mate. I'm telling you, I lived next to a Greek family who had nothing but racial abuse to give to me."

So I was a bit controversial without actually meaning to be controversial. I was asking the question and in the same way I'd be going, "Sorry, so you're telling me that I can't bring my five year old nephew? If it was a girl it would be fine, but I can't bring him? Well, then I can't come because he's here for a week." So, those sorts of things. I don't really see myself as being majorly political but I think for the women at the Women's Centre, I was quite "not towing the party line". No, I don't want to go to Greenham Common. I'm quite happy to do the demos here but that... Rebel Dykes.

Evelyn: So tell us a little bit more about the Rebel Dykes. We're now kind of mid-'80s, probably?

Yvonne: It was probably about, well, to start with, '86? Well no, I would have met this lot in '84 when we were all squatting in Villa Road or somewhere else. Do you mind if I smoke?

Evelyn: It's okay. It's your house.

Yvonne: It's just weird because people like Laney and Siobhan and all of those people were just around and if there was anything happening I always used to get an invite, even though I was the one that was kind of smartly dressed, I never wore trainers.

Evelyn: I mean, at the time they would have been called Leatherdykes or S&M dykes.

Yvonne: Yeah, S&M dykes. Well that was the whole Rebel Dyke thing, it did get a lot thrust on them, because there were the Rebel Dykes, and then there were the S&Mers, and they might have been Rebel Dykes as well, they might not have been. And then they had all those fetish clubs that was always being knocked. I mean, I kind of go, "Well, if you don't like it, don't go." And I do remember there was an incident where there was a movie, which I can never remember what it was called but it had an American actress and there's a black woman, well actually, she looked more like she could have been a Red Indian... but basically, the ethos to this story was that they were having this relationship and Lois Weaver, that's who was it, the actress, she played the femme part of the relationship and honestly-

Evelyn: [Indistinct]

Yvonne: It was the butch. And that caused so much furore that there was a whole league of these feminists that decided to campaign outside it and I'm one of them people kind of go, "Well, I'm going to go and see the movie and make up my own mind". But oh god, it caused so much controversy as we walked in. Yeah. "How's a black woman coming out and condoning this, that and the other?" And I'm like, "I'm not condoning anything. I haven't seen the movie, so I can't really comment on it".

The movie wasn't great but I didn't really see what the controversy was about either. So from then on, I just thought, "I'm just going to do my own thing." The Rebel Dykes were doing a... Well, Rebel Dykes/... I can't remember what the S&M club was called, but they were doing a party at the Ovalhouse and they asked me and the other DJ from Systematic to play, so we did. There was all these boycotters out there and they see us rolling up and it's like, "Now what're you going to say?" Because I'm like, "Yeah, I don't mind a bit of leather. I don't mind what people do in the bedroom, as long as it's consensual. And I don't really care what you're wearing, but I'd rather wear what they're wearing than those Jesus sandals and whatever that frock is you've got on."

If it's done on that basics, but it was really controversial. I used to get a lot of hassle, mostly from black women, if I dated a white woman. I'm like, "Wow, you don't pay my rent? You know, when I'm pissed off and upset, I don't see black or white." So it was a bit... I just fell through this loop which was like, "Nah. I've grown up with people trying to tell me what to do," and I'm like, "Actually, this is not happening again."

So I've always been this... what's the word I'm looking for?.. controversial, independent being and the Rebel Dykes... you know, a lot of black women were very confused by them. I just thought... Yeah, I'm not saying they were perfect. Like I said, I'd go to some of them parties and I'd go, "I'm completely lost at what's going off at this party." Bit like drug ravaged, drink ravaged but they were always really friendly and they didn't seem to have... what's the word I'm looking for? Like at the Women's Centre it was all about appeasing any ethnic minority that came through the door, but actually some of those women I just thought were out and out dodgy racists.

Rebel Dykes, they kind of cared for everybody. The dog with the limp down the road, the straight old lady down the road. They were very out and loud and proud, whatever that meant for them. But they were also far more caring than most of the feminist, lesbian types at the Women's Centre, who thought it was

okay to tell me that, "What, you spend 30 quid on a pair of jeans?"... Wow, that's not okay. I mean, yeah, they made a lot of money out of us. They could have done that women's centre up one time, but they just wanted to stay in that mentality of, "You need to look poverty-stricken. You need to be defending this and defending that." We need to be telling these women that are having to sell their bodies that it's no okay and da, da, da, da. And I thought, "For god's sake. Yes, there is an element of that whole sex industry that was always going to be wrong, but for those ones that knew what they were doing...

Bear in mind, I've just told you my grandmother ran brothels and she did really well with it and from everything by brother tells me, because he lived at that brothel, that she had the same women working for her all the time because she made it a safe haven and so they weren't allowed to take drugs and so I'm very much aware of how the sex industry works. But I kind of go, "Yeah, it's not ever going to go away, so should you not be campaigning to make it safer? Legalise it or do something which means that they've got somewhere to go and feel like safe about not being judged?"

There's a lot of that and I remember I used to hang around with an Asian woman who had really long hair and wore mini skirts. We'd turn up for a gig and the lesbians would go, "This is a women-only, lesbian space." And I'm like, "Why are you telling us that? Because she's probably more of a lesbian than I am. Just because she wears a mini skirt and has long hair." So there's all that sort of judgment thing about what constituted... what the rules for being a lesbian are like. We're all from different places.

Evelyn: Sort of policing other people's behaviour?

Yvonne: Kind of. Except for mine.

Evelyn: Or attempts to police other people's behaviour?

Yvonne: Yeah, and it was a lot easier to attempt to police the white women that they felt weren't towing the line. Whereas we could go in and guilt-trip them on racism. It was just a load of crap. So I got into quite a few arguments, not just with white feminists but with black feminists too. Yeah, I get it, but I'm like, everything... It was like these controversial yet these two extremes of people writing these books and... I'm not the most academic person, but I'm sorry, there was some of those American writers that I just thought, "Wow. This is right-wing rhetoric being dressed up as right-wing feminism." Well, it seemed like that to me.

And then you've got the other side of it which was a bit extreme. Everything should be for free and .. let's get real.. with this system -how do you work that? Yeah, it was an interesting time but as a promoter, I got to know lots of different people, I went round to lots of different things. In those days we had to go fly for everything, so I was out quite a lot. So I got to see lots of different-

Evelyn: So yeah, well, before the Internet, before mobile phones. So how did people know? How did they come?

Yvonne: Well, we used to go round and fly everything. The white girl clubs, the black people's clubs. Any [crosstalk 01:00:34]

Evelyn: So literally handing out leaflets.

Yvonne: Handing out leaflets, yeah. And within... Well, the first one we did was packed outWe never had one that was empty, from day one. And we did that club for eight years. And so we were definitely needed. Obviously, the Women's Centre went and so we had to go too, but yeah.

And after eight years, the collective that worked it, we all had different ideas. Things were moving on, we were starting to get mobile phones, there was a different... The computers were just starting to arrive, so it was a very different way of having to do things and people didn't really want to change. Nobody wanted to change. And when the Women's Centre went, I mean that south London Women's Centre, for all it's strange characters that were involved in running it, it did help catapult a lot of young people into... there's a life, it's not all "burning your bra" and there's a whole social aspect to it. And then we had the Lesbian and Gay Centre, the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre in Peckham, of which there is a documentary done by a woman called Veronica McKenzie, if you get a chance to see that, that tells you a great deal.

Evelyn: Yeah, I've seen some-

Yvonne: You've seen... yeah.

Evelyn: trailers for it..

Yvonne: And I find it really interesting that...

Yvonne: And it’s like, um. I find it interesting that the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival he first started off were quite happy to show those kinds of things, those historical things and now we just get to see some glossy soft porn pretty whatever it is. For me, I just find it baffling. So we've come a long way but we've not come a long way. Because we seem to have sold ourselves to the corporate and back in the day and now thinking, yeah, if we knew if we'd have had more confidence and more money, probably we would do things slightly differently, but we didn't. But out of it came quite a lot of good. Like I said, there's many people.

Evelyn: What did you move onto after Systematic?

Yvonne: I got a job.

Evelyn: Oh.

Yvonne: I worked for Lambeth council, for their single homeless project, which was basically a bunch of kids that were mostly young black kids in South London who didn't want to come home at two o'clock when their parents said come home and said, after two their parents were kicking them out and they were turning up going, I'm homeless.

Actually, no, you're not homeless. There are homeless people. You just made yourself intentionally homeless but Lambeth with being, that sort of social thing wasn't really addressing the problem of family miscommunication and people just exploiting the system. So I stayed there for two years. You know, I can't do this. I did do quite a bit at changing the system, sort of picking out the weak, the real cases as opposed to the ones that were described. And we had a

lot of young women, they were turning up pregnant because they could get a flat and all of that. And then you give them the flat and then they can't manage it because nobody's ever... They've never lived on their own let alone managed a child. So it was not that .. yeah, the systems, didn't really work. So I worked in housing for maybe another eight years and worked at the Lambeth Single Homelessness. Then I went to Lambeth council, worked in Streatham managing council properties. Yeah. That was an absolute nightmare.

I saw some things that shouldn't really seen an old Lambeth corruption thing was just appalling. Infiltration of Freemasons and running of the builders and ripping off the council. It was a diabolical. And then I went to work for Homeless Action. It was a collective, for God's sake. I'm not really fond of collectives it takes far too long to make a decision when you've got like a 15 women all trying to like say their peace like God really? So, and then I went, I left that and did a arts admin course cause I felt, I liked working in creative situations and my friend had said to me, yeah, you're much better at the social side of things. So I did this course work for the theatre company worked for a dance company and then got into hospitality 20 odd years ago. And I've been in it ever since.

In bars, clubs, restaurants, cafes, to the point where someone's actually gone and got a space where you're here's the keys, do what you will. Put my name on his staff.

Evelyn: So what would you say are the ingredients of a great club night?

Yvonne: Well, good music, DJs that are passionate about music, and the idea of... For me, I'm going out and it's not that I want to forget the world, but I've just paid whatever it is to get into a club, I want to remember it, kind of want to meet people. I went with my friends, I see them all the time. Don't really want to stand around chatting to them all the time. I kind of put the music and all for me as a promoter I will say the way a club runs stems from the way when people come through the door :about the reception, and about the energy of the space.

And so I'm like very keen on creating, good energies. So I ran that. We ran that. It's the Women's Club , I now run mixed clubs. Sunday Happy Days probably my biggest change because it was more about, I mean I don't care who you sleep with; of course it's like 75 80% gay, but like now these LBGT people have a space that they can bring, their siblings and it gives them a different perspective on what it is we do in our social life. Because for all those years it was like: I don't want to go there because it would just be this or just be that. And you know, that's not the case now. So I've been going to straight clubs forever. Really. Because I like music. I used to go to the Soul to Soul parties when they were... I remember those like the thing people would say you're going into a straight party and knowing - yeah you haven't been, it's not that straight.

You know it isn't, it is predominantly a black club. There's white people that are inside. There's lots of gay people there. Nobody gives a fuck. And so the face of it, the thing for me is that when I go out, my name is Yvonne who I sleep with? If you asked me that question already, you need to leave 'cause it's not, that's not what we go out for. I should be able to go anywhere and not have to worry about being who I am. So I created those spaces. Really that means people can

go out. I mean Sunday Happy days, prime example. I mean I've had people, New Year party bring their parents. I mean there's no way that would've happened 30 years ago. You wouldn't want to take them cause of you some backdoor place and I'm really keen about venues that we should be able to use the same venues everybody else uses and that was... Yeah.

We talk about why we don't have spaces now. And a lot of that is the spaces that we did go to, weren't making enough money to continue. And people didn't want to pay and especially the lesbians at the time didn't pay out. And I'm like, you pay five pounds to get into a club in the 1980s Even with inflation, that's definitely gone up. I'm keen to keep pricing down and stuff, but we live in the real world and what I want to do is create a safe space for all of us to be and feel safe and feel safe enough to bring friends that are friends, our friends that not necessarily label themselves.

And I think that's helped kind of like integrate. Or to make the others understand who we are, but we're not just going out and getting our leg over. You know we're not all men haters or all women haters. Because it was kind of segregated when I got here. Hardly anybody knew gay man. A few and I say with, like, the Gay Liberation front. Yeah. I think that was as close I got to hanging out with gay blokes and the Gays the Word bookshop And then-

Evelyn: So the late seventies and very early eighties the community was very split. The women stayed with women and the men stayed at the men because the women didn't feel the men were addressing their issues that are very different issues.

Yvonne: And they weren't. They weren't addressing the issues.. Actually, I mean really you have to ask yourself... It wasn't really until the whole AIDS thing came about and then section 28 and who did most of the campaigning for that? Lesbians.

Evelyn: Absolutely Lesbian Avengers.

Yvonne: Yeah. Yeah. And so like now we're at a situation where, I can go to any club, LBGT club anywhere and nobody's calling me fish anymore. Yeah. I don't know. Yeah. So it for me it's been a bit of a... I kind of go, my name's Yvonne and I don't care. I'm just going to go in the club and I'm kind of strong enough to kind of carry myself I stand out anyway. I don't blend into look gay, straight, whatever it is. I'm definitely always going to stand out. I always wear a hat, so I'm always dressing my own inimitable style so and I've done that ever since I've come to London. So, I thought to myself - well, who's going to make me leave?

Evelyn: I would like to see them try!

Yvonne: I mean without any sort of having to do any cross words, but I mean, I'll walk with a smile, and I'll walk with enough sassiness to kind of go, Oh yeah, ….. club. Yeah. And clubbing has changed a great deal. Right now there is more and more sort of clubs I go to. And I just went to a festival in Croatia earlier this year and I went to stay with this straight couple that I know. Me and another lesbian. I mean there was loads of us there. I thought we were going to the only LGBT, but there were loads of them. I found out, I kept bumping into people going: Oh my God. It's the first party I've been able to come to festival where everybody in the room is just here for the party and for me it's a big sign of a change in the clubbing world and whilst that may not be the most political

thing anyone want to hear. I would say it probably does more for changing people's attitudes towards each other.

Than you know, the politics, which can sometimes come down as a bit like dictatorial. Yeah. Like it has to be like this. It has to be like that. Yeah.

Evelyn: So we've had at one level we've had all the different legislation over the years since like 67 and the sexual offenses act, but at the social level in clubs and meeting places as well. You feel the attitudes change?

Yvonne: Definitely. Like I said, I was on this trip it was like what we'd call like sort of black music, but like it was really nice mix. In fairness they wrote about they were thirty-five plus, you know? Yeah.

Evelyn: Certain age.

Yvonne: Yeah. They've got kids and they coming back out and it's kind of like there were straight parties I used to go to back in the 80s where people were a bit less concerned about who you were sleeping with. They're more interested in who you were. And I've never been a person to leave my house to go out to get laid because I just don't understand it. I'm not just going to go out and get absolutely pissed. It's not good. I'm not saying I haven't got pissed or haven't gotten laid, but I don't leave my house with those ideas. My thing has always been, well I'm going to go out and have a good dance. And I'm going to have a laugh and I mean when I was younger and Nottinghamand I used to go and we used to save our money, get our pay on Friday, and then we'd go up to Wiggins casino.

I mean, I'm not really into like Northern soul. I like the music, but there were all these kids that was their Friday. That was their thing. Yeah. People just go out with no kind of... That's why I don't work in clubs anymore. They go out, they come into the club, they're already smashed and they don't even know their names and it's just become very ugly. So I'm very selective about where I go and people say, well, you know, we were all young once. And I'm like, actually I was never that young. I was never that young that I thought I'm going to go out and not find the way home. I live in Portsmouth and I've lost my bag and my friends and now you want to promoters at the party to get you home. Er.. not really. So those things are changed. But I say my real point is that we've gone from that complete segregation to now where... And probably the better things that came out of Margaret Thatcher, her introduction of Draconian Laws and then suddenly we were thrust into dealing with gay man and-

Evelyn: Kind of pull the community together in the face of adversity didn't it really?

Yvonne: I mean, yeah.

Evelyn: And also push the community up in the public's eyes because everybody was out there and protesting and campaigning and acting.

Yvonne: Yeah. I was lucky, when I was living in Brighton, I meant this woman called Kai and for me, I mean, she's run that little women's sex shop for 25 years and things like that have kind of changed the way we operate because obviously lesbian as it was aimed at women, not just lesbians, all women. It's very woman focused. Have you ever been there.?

Evelyn: Yeah.

Yvonne: Surely it's very women focused.

Evelyn: So perhaps you describe it a bit further.

Yvonne: Well, basically it's a sex shop. It's a thousand times better than anything Anne Summers ever came up with. So it was an alternative to that sort of lifestyle. And it was a shop that was based in Hoxton. It's still in Hoxton, but it's moved to a bigger space. But this little shop in Hoxton square, which I worked for a short while... The women that were coming in, there weren't just lesbians. They were from all walks of life. City life, old people in their sixties and seventies coming in by buying butt plugs and things like that. But you know, it's, it's one of these, all of these smaller things that have sort of like help to change the way we all perceive each other. And you know, gay men... When I started going to the bigger house clubs, what I call the really stushi ones, which would be white gay men, they never seen the likes of us before.

I believe because of the clause 28 and that sort of shift in us all having to work together to campaign. I think it kind of changed the way that they perceived us. And when we started going to those clubs in that early... I mean, but in the 90'st I'd take quite a few of my black friends to these parties. Those guys were intrigued, but you know, at the same time they were intrigued in a positive way. And that to me was a big change, coming to the Soul to Soul parties in the beginning of Jazzy B and I used to go regularly with my friends. And he would always come out from behind that booth, he knew our names, he would sort us out some drink. He clearly knew who we were.

We became good friends because to be able to go to a club, a predominately black club that played music that we liked without fear or constant looking over your shoulder. It was a major thing, cause you know you may not like clubs and it's fine. You never have to put... I as a person, that's my entertainment. It was, it was a big thing. Those for me were crucial changes and Margaret Thatcher came in and unwittingly forced groups of people that she was trying to dismantle, you know together, much as I hate the woman, there's some things that she did that kind of like helped to change people's viewpoints. I mean the AIDS epidemic was catastrophic and I spent a lot of time in New York and that it was really catastrophic there, and here it was like it was mostly the lesbians that were campaigning and fundraising.

Yeah. As per usual. And I think these white gay men, were suddenly going: Wow! they're actually campaigning. I mean it was quite phenomenal.

Evelyn: Yeah. They're on our side.

Yvonne: Yeah. I mean, I don't know what that was about, but yeah, it was frightening. And yeah, I mean my friend bought the Candy Bar… ran the Candy Bar and as crazy as she was, I think the Candy Bar was another major significant change in Soho because we had no nowhere to go in Soho.

Evelyn: So it was very male. It was lots of gay clubs. But all men.

Yvonne: But I went to lots of different things out there. Like that's what I did. I mean, I used to go to a white club, but I was, yeah, in the 70s, the 100 club. But really

what happened was when the Candy Bar arrived in the 90s it kind of changed everything because suddenly all the promoters from the men's clubs were around.

Yeah. And, and I got an ID card and I could just go to work. I could go all over Soho. So I did, but it ended, I mean I did it all - the straight and the gay and so for me it was like , a bit like a home for 20 years, there was lots to do. And I hadn't been around for the last sort of 10 years there, but just recently I started working back there. And it's kind of funny that people still remember me and they didn't know my name, they'd just say yes, smiler's around. Yeah.

Evelyn: They know your face.

Yvonne: It's been a very different experience than, say, for many of the black women who were born around my time is, yeah. The whole thing. I mean, I was lucky I had family that was supportive and even my mum as crazy as she was it wasn't an issue. So I didn't really have all of that, you know, "get out my house", you know.

Evelyn: Lots of women did.

Yvonne: Yeah. Exactly, I appreciate that. I mean in a way that's what allowed me to walk openly and tall. And even though I didn't really know my real dad, I didn't meet him until I was 21. And then when I moved here I had to go and see him and he said, just so you know, you're my daughter and if you need any help just let me know. I was thinking what's that all about? And in the whole time I lived in Brixton, I had one incident where... Some, actually the guy wasn't very well behaved said to me he ..started hurling out this homophobic abuse, which me and my friend had to come from the outside, leap over chairs to get indoors. And then, next thing I know, these bunch of young women kind of just got hold of him and start kicking the hell out of them. And I thought, really?

And then when you go out every... I saw a lot of these men, these bastards and all would say hello to me. How you doing? And I'm thinking, Do I know you? And it was because they all knew who I was.

Evelyn: They knew your dad.

Yvonne: They knew my dad and he had obviously said yeah. I mean-

Evelyn: ...keep an eye on her.

Yvonne: I mean I didn't even know who he was, when I met him he was just, when we did the parties at the South London Women's Centre for example, I used to have to go and buy extra beer or something. I would have to go the shop along near me in Clapham. And I didn't realise for years that that was his shop. Because whoever this guy was, was always going, obviously you get a discount. I'm looking and I don't know what that's about. But when he died I realised all these blokes that were there … they'd been the ones that had been making sure that nobody was... Cause actually I could walk around, get some air at night and never get any hassle.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Yvonne: Other friends that were walking around and you know, they wouldn't do it because it would be quite dangerous.

So I suppose maybe I'll call it a different perspective on the whole way that I navigated my life as a black woman which has been based on the fact that if my sexuality had been problem for my family that could have been a lot. Could have been a real problem, but it hasn't been. So I might... Most of the black women that I knew at the time who had to run away from home and couldn't be seen in photographs or couldn't be out. Yeah. And some of them had kids and then realised later on, so it was very difficult for a lot of ..a lot of women full stop. But in particular for women of colour. In particular Asian women running away from arranged marriages and you know [indistinct] in the community and you know, it's quite difficult time to be out gay or lesbian or anything else in between really now cause we're getting into the alphabet group of people now.

But for me it's not, I know that walking down the street, holding hands in Brixton probably wouldn't have been a sensible thing to do. But now people don't really care. And then I moved here 20 years ago thinking I'm in the middle of redneck city. Yeah. There's a bunch of homophobes and actually it's the place I have the least hassle. Yeah. It kind of reminds me of Nottingham and which they might have their opinions about things, but if you live in the neighbourhood, they're not. Yeah, yeah. You're our gay or you're our lesbian or whatever it is they think. It does afford you a degree of protection. I'm not saying, I don't know that that's a good thing or a bad thing.

Evelyn: But it's kind of family in a way. If you're in our neighbourhood.

Yvonne: Yeah. Yeah. Which is how I grew up. We used to have this woman... Oh, she was just terrible. She was such a racist little… yeah. But, when we had the power cuts or was snowed in or, you know, my dad always made me go down and, or make us go down and make sure she had extra blankets or take the paraffin. Yeah. So ipeople do learn to coexist with each other. Any change if people are thrust into... We sort of going white gay men straight man, like this guy who's giving me the keys to these premises. French guy's he's a property developer. He's got money and maybe 20 years ago for a friend and of a French woman and who believes that, like 20 years later I've this thing, I think you should just, take it and see what you can do with it.

I'm going to pay mortgage on it for a year. Do you want the keys? I'm like, I'm still like that. Like what? So, that's because...

Evelyn: This is you're a new venture in Camden.

Yvonne: Yeah. But this is how, when I met him, I just thought you're a bit geezerish but I can slap you down if you just step out of line. And so, he's never really met anyone like me and I'll never met anyone like him. And actually he turns out to be one of the nicest people I've ever met. And he isn't philanthropic. Philanthropic is not what comes to mind but it kind of is what he is about. And yeah. So for me, I, it's been an interesting journey from, when I first ever came to London, which would've been 1977 when I joined the army. I got a train from Waterloo. And then in November of 77 I came here for my first long weekend – went to the Black Cap I went to Heaven.

I went to not Heaven, I went to the Black Cap and something else and the Black Cap was there.

Evelyn: Pub in Camden.

Yvonne: Yeah.

Evelyn: Famous for?

Yvonne: Drag acts. I didn't really get it, but I met, Laurence Malice in there when I was 18 and who knew that, over the next few.. 20 years or so that he ran Trade, he frequently visited the Candy Bar. I mean, and then actually when he came and saw me, he said, I know you from somewhere. And I thought you meant when I was 18 dissing the drag Queens. And he took me, he said, we're going to go to this after party in Kentish town. And I saw drag Queens in their full flight of pissed off drug fucked eyelashes here, their lipstick all the way down here. And it's quite entertaining for me.

But you know, I've been able to arrive here and see all the different aspects, the Gay's the Word bookshop the Gay Liberation front. I've seen them all in their different guises. And so in a way that's kind of afforded me a lot of what's the word I'm looking for it? I can go to any of these different groups and somebody will know me. Yeah. Seen before. Yeah. I mean when I first came in the 70s, I just used to follow random people into basement bars in Soho and-

Evelyn: ... and there was so often basement bars was when it was the LGBT community, particularly the women.

Yvonne: Well it was... I mean, we didn't get them in Soho, the women. But there's a lot of what I call now the under underground, sort of gay drag, not drag, I don't even really call it drag. Performance bars and it was just a bit more of an interesting, interesting thing. And maybe I just followed someone who looked a bit interesting into a club. I, yeah, the ….. club, I like, I didn't even know what it was, but I'd seen it before. And so it's quite some random people. So I followed this person that looked like Marilyn into this club. Turns out it was Marilyn and Boy George. And so the people at the door just thought I was their mate so I could always get in. And that went on throughout my clubbing days even when the end was around , I was so well known there that, you know, I could go there [indistinct]

So, in that sort of sense, but in terms of the lesbian culture, I've just been around it all. Or I can do the .. dinners, I can do the 'there's no men here'. I can do all of that. If this is your standpoint, that's fine. But as I run mixed clubs these days, it's kind of interesting seeing the old school lesbians that would never even thought about being in a space with guys coming to the club. And repeatedly coming to these parties and because they didn't go out that often... And not fazed by seeing a bunch of gay men or some straight women. And it's definitely changed our own perspective on how we are fitting into life, I mean not saying anybody's lost their politics. Just means we're less excluded from places that we weren't very welcome to welcomed at in the past. And also I just hate that whole old school feeling, You went some back of beyond place where you'd got to knock on a hatched door to get in.

Evelyn: Say a secret password.

Yvonne: Oh my goodness.

Evelyn: Secret club. Just for women. Because some women now bemoan the fact that there's no exclusively women's places anymore. But you see it as a positive move over time.

Yvonne: I think that we should have women only spaces and you know, I mean [inaudible 01:31:10] we did a reunion one in where are we now? In October, and we're going to do another one because there is really a definite need for a women only space. The thing is you would find somewhere that's really cheap, drinks were cheap otherwise they don't come out. But it's like, you can't do anything for free as a promoter. I don't mind not making any money, but I don't want to lose money. And so it's kind of very difficult to get a balance.

I mean, I'm trying to think of, I don't think I mean even Mint, which is, you know, 99% women, but they're all sort of young, straight looking. No idea of people like me. I mean it's quite frightening that like the young people these days kind of think of lesbians as being these staunch vegan eating whatever. But nothing about it is positive. That actually worries me because I kind of go, but where did you get that idea from? And I know like quite a few of the young promoters at the moment kind of know who I am, but they're a bit kind of weirded out by me because their not really sure. Not really sure. Yeah. What is she? She's a lesbian. Don't really matter what I am. But like you didn't get here without the help of the previous lesbians. And, and-

Evelyn: ... do you think there's a certain amount of, kind of lesbian erasure a they say?

Yvonne: A certain amount! Totally.

Evelyn: Because you see the young people out and you feel that? They just...

Yvonne: And I think, cause I still got.

Evelyn: [Well 01:33:00] that they just-

Yvonne: Yeah. It's breaking down some barriers for them. Because this group of young people that run a night called BBZ and I actually think that they're all academic and they’re sort of ..their parents are probably writers ... Whatever. Doesn't really matter. Because they're the first group that's actually invited me along and said, "Oh, we'd really like you to come and hang out at the pub." And because of the history that the whole lesbian thing has had, I'm like I haven’t had a lesbian fight in a bar, like, for forever. Being straight comes with their fights. And they're still stuck in that negative connotations about who we were.

For example, I went to see a documentary done by Roman Mandrake. It's about butch and femme. And how they made that documentary, you never actually saw people. You just saw their house while they talked so that you didn't really see. And I remember this young, young black woman who I've known for ages, and is really super intelligent, has a fabulous job. And they went, "Oh, wow. I didn't really understand that's what butch and femme was about." And I'm like, you look very boyish, androgynous, let's put it that way. But I was like, how would you think that that's not how those relationships are just because one person is butch and one person is femme. The assumption is that the butch is going to be this like gruff male. Oh my God, you are so way off the mark.

And it's even just understanding those kinds of relationships. See, now, I've got to understand ..when they have these dos, it's always about femmes and nothing to do with people like myself who are... Probably, years ago, I just said my name was Yvonne, and now I'm claiming that. You're not writing us out of issue. All the fucking work we did to get you all here so that you can get funding for your parties, and sponsorship by ASOS and all these people that are... You're all over the TV now. How the hell do you think you got there?

Evelyn: A lot of butch women got you there.

Yvonne: Yeah, exactly. And it's like that sort of thing is ignorance. Because, probably, anything that's out there about us is quite negative. We don't like men. We don't do this. We don't do that. I'm like, who told you all this crap? I did a panel, couple years ago, Rich Mix. And it was about promoters. Obviously, I'm a bit of a maverick. Because I get really nice venues. I work in hospitality. I know people. So I can get really nice venues. I bring a nice, happy crowd who are happy to spend their money in a nice venue.

Obviously, if you've got it, you want to go and feel somewhere safe. One of the questions I was asked was, "How do I make an intersex person safe?" I was like, "Any club I run, anybody who comes in, I don't care who you sleep with. It's a safe space." But it's all of this me, me, me. I'm like, wow, this has so taken us all out of the equation. And to be honest with you, I don't even feel that great on white gay men. Not that I'm campaigning for anything. But I'm like, it's definite we've been written out of history. We're being written out of history as we speak by our own-

Evelyn: [inaudible 01:37:06].

Yvonne: Yeah. And I just go, wow, it's not right. I don't know if you've seen that show that was on. It's a group of lesbians that were giving sex advice to straight couples.

Evelyn: Oh, I did see a little bit of it. To be honest, just one programme].

Yvonne: I only seen one. But I was thinking, what the hell is this? But actually, when I looked at it, it's the first time where I've actually seen something on mainstream TV that actually, in terms of the stereotypical type lesbians, this panel pretty much was... There was a really butch woman with short cut hair and leather waistcoat and stuff. I was really proud. Because, I was thinking, we got all these Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, this that and the other bit. It all involved all this refined drag trend.

Evelyn: Feminised.

Yvonne: Yeah. But no actual lesbians. I mean I don't like those reality programmes , but I'm just glad to see one with normal lesbians on the program giving advice. And very good advice at that.

Evelyn: Because it's about role models. And if younger people don't have positive role models of out and proud butch women, where are their choices, I guess?

Yvonne: My nephews have all grown up with me as being the weird auntie. But they've always known that I'm gay. But come summer holidays, they want to come

spend it with me. And I have this one nephew Jordan. He's just a diamond. And he's come down. He came down this one week. And he said, "Oh, you got to watch this program." And it was a sex education program. I do a lot of extra work. And he said to me, "Aunt Yvonne, I think you should do this." Basically, what it was, it was they go to a senior school. They had a doctor and some sex expert. And there would be a screen. So we couldn't see them. But they could see us.

And I remember doing this show. And it was like four women. I was the only black woman. I dreaded it at the time. And part of the scene involved you standing there naked. Right? I was just on it with four straight white women. And they did a little survey. They said, "Do you mind if we ask a question about sexuality?" They did this survey that said, which of these people do you think are gay? I got two votes out of 400 kids. And it was the two young gay kids that supported me. But everybody else voted for the straight women.

And it just goes to show that young people are much more open to differences. Because my nephew knew straight away that that program would be something like me and he was about 14 at the time. And it's about breaking down barriers. I've worked with youth. Mostly young men. And that's with Avi and I mean Avi had so much respect for that youth club without having to pretend to be anything else.

Evelyn: For the sake of listeners in the future, Avi was an amazing character who ran motorcycle workshops to get young people in off the streets-

Yvonne: She was crucial to Camden's youth program. She ran the mechanics thing but she also ran a youth club called the Juice Bar And it was lovely.

Evelyn: [inaudible 01:40:43]?

Yvonne: Called the Juice Bar.

Evelyn: Juice Bar.

Yvonne: And it's sort of like up Dartmouth Hill Road. It's like Tufnell Park. Parliament Hill. Highgate. Surrounded by wealth. You've got these council estates hidden away. She ran this youth club there. And I kid you not, she was the most important person in their lives. And she definitely was an out-and-out dyke. For me, I'm like, when people decide to get into an argument with me and think that calling me a les is going to break me down-

Evelyn: Be an insult.

Yvonne: Well, not for me. Okay, that's not an insult. It's like you're just stating the obvious. It's like I'm going to call you a dickhead now, because that's exactly how you are behaving is like a dickhead. And a lot of it is about the rising homophobia abuse is coming up now and racist abuse. I feel like we're going back-

Evelyn: You felt a real increase?

Yvonne: Oh my God. I feel like we're going back to the 60s when I'm like, "Really? Did you just say that to me?" I mean I've worked in some bars that I really shouldn't

have done. But I I kinda go, "Sir, I'm serving you drink. I'm serving you food. If you think it's okay to talk to me like this." Right. It's like while I'm handling your food and drink. "You go ahead with yourself." But it is quite frightening. I mean it's always been there.

But I hadn't particularly got it because because I kind of like walk quite tall. So people are a bit confused. They think I'm going to mug them. Or they think if they're going to mug me, that's going to be really difficult. I don't get as much hassle as say my friend who's got long blonde hair and wears skirts walking down the street late at night. But I've noticed in the day that people in the tube particularly, people think it's okay to just start hurling abuse at people. I'm like, "Really? We're almost in the 21st century and this how...." For me, I'm extremely, extremely worried for the future of this country. Because really and truly there's no, I can't really say that there's... I wouldn't want to send my young son or someone into the street. I mean I've lived here for years and still, kids think it's okay to call you a paki. They're not from Pakistan. They're from Bangladesh. It's all that sort of stuff. The rise around here. I mean this is a redneck area anyway. But it kind of stopped for a while. Actually, it kind of stopped when the old school gangsters left. They all died or whatever. But now, you can't have a conversation with the cab driver about the pakis in the neighbourhood. Because why would you think I'd entertain that?

And I've noticed those sort of things around here. Now, I'm all right. Usblack people in terms of Caribbeans are okay. But all the rest of them. I'm like, wow. It's actually really, really frightening. I'm thinking, wow. When I get old, do I really, really walk in the streets? Because people just seem to have licence to abuse us. And that's taking me back to when I was a child.

Evelyn: Hopefully, the circle will turn again. Get to a better place.

Yvonne: Better do it in my lifetime. Because, otherwise, I'm going, what the hell did... We did all this stuff. And we're going back. And it's like we did all this stuff. And the people that were instrumental in changing things for lots of people are being written out of history. Yeah. Intelligent. Intelligent. Gender neutral. They. Them. These. Them. Even they're not talking about us in a positive light. Like we're holding them back. We paved the way for you to be you. I'm not saying we need to do that. But please, get to know your history. Yeah.

Evelyn: That's what we've been about today is putting some of that history on record with your own words and your own thoughts. Is there anything that you were thinking of before I came that you feel we haven't touched on?

Yvonne: Well, I mean there's a whole politics of the Labour councils like Lambeth Council that run that bloody place into a rack and ruin. Those sorts of politics. About the extremes of politics. I mean I always vote Labour. Back in the day, it was all a bit too extreme. It was like when you wanted to change things, when you want to take people with you, there's a way to do it. Sacking that bloke because he's always used the word chalkie or darkie or whatever. Kind of seemed a bit extreme to me, because he uses that even with his mates that were black. And they've allowed him to get away with that for years. And now, we're getting to that extreme that you can't really say anything.

See, I can deal with ignorance. I can't deal with this dark, dark kind of underhand racism. Which when I worked in Lambeth, I just saw... And I said,

"All you people now that know like Ps and Qs of what to say or not to say. But actually, you're not any better than maybe some Tory [blue rinse in the Cotswolds or something." And obviously, my experience in the army working with those posh people. And many of them were like up their own backsides. Too much money for their own good. When I can walk into the Dorchester Hotel without any hassle and go to some no name thing down the road and they're like going, "There's no room in the inn." Kind of go, yeah, that's the thing that we should be doing is changing those working class people's view of how we've been portrayed to them.

And will continue to be portrayed to them. Because, before, it was us. And now, it's Muslims. There's always somebody like corporate's that's got an invested interest in stirring up this hatred. And to me, that's like we've moved off from gays but lesbians are still frowned upon. Used to work for Lambeth Council, that's why I stopped going to Christmas parties. [inaudible 01:47:53] been really like fucking lesbian [inaudible 01:47:56]. Now, you've had a few drinks. Now, you want to talk about my life and how you kind of like me. I'm like, really? Really? Just because I sleep with women. Do you think I just do that with any old woman? Yeah. There's lots of things that are still undercurrent and much more subtle done by the educated left. Actually, the extreme right, at least I know how they feel.

Evelyn: In your face. You can deal with it.

Yvonne: And then, you make all these silly things. Yeah, my experience of working in Lambeth in the Linda Belos era was like, wow, this is a bit fucked up. We've gone from one extreme to the other. And in between all that, people are just confused. And I don't think it feels it got any better. We just know that the Tories are a bunch of capitalist fuckers. But still, they get voted in. Because, what are they good at? They're good at creating division. And it's still working. It's still working with all the... Lesbians and gays still think ..we're all members of the public really. Some views I've heard from lesbians. I'm like, wow, really?

I mean when Candy Bar opened up, if it wasn't for Kim Lucas,if it had been anybody else, we would have never got in that bar. And she made me work in that bar. That's how it all started. She said, "Look, if you'd come work for me, even for say six months. I want this to be a bar that all women are welcome in." And she did change. In terms of being in Soho, and suddenly we had nights that we could do in a space in Soho. It was phenomenal. We were like that. God lesbian nights. Proper lesbian nights. And it's right. When you go out on a Friday night, I just want to go out. I'm pleased that we've got these spaces. But they're still devoid of many ethnic minorities attending. Tells me that we haven't really gone that far.

And even the new generation of non-binary people that have parties. They have their own parties. They don't go to anybody else's parties. We've still got that division within. If you're into drag, you tend to stay in drag bars. If you're transgender, you tend to stay with people that you know that make you feel safe. I mean I run this club Sunday Happy Day. Everybody's welcome. We've got a group of Filipino lady boys that come quite regularly. And they will tell you that, actually, in this mixed environment, they felt really, really safe. You go out. You want to feel safe. You don't want to have to pretend to be something you're not. And you don't want to have to go to some club just because there's

like-minded people that look like you. Because it's not necessary that you will even be having anything in common.

I'm at this stage in my life where I go to places where nobody deems my sexuality a reason to abuse me. If I was rude, oh yeah, did something wrong. That's different. I go to safe spaces. It's not necessary that all those safe spaces are the alphabet clubs, as I've started to call them. Like I said, I know most of the people that run different things. [inaudible 01:51:34] any given day. If I didn't know these people, then it would be kind of hard to walk in on your own and get someone to speak to you. I mean I've been to a few of these non-binary parties. And I'm like, wow, there's 80% black people in here. And not one of them is going to smile and say hello. There's still a bit of division amongst us all. I mean I can walk tall. So I don't care. For someone that's new that goes along... And I've spoken to them about it. They're trying to do things about it. But there's not many of the groups that are really ready to venture out.

Evelyn: You've had a life of really trying to bring people together. Trying to erase some of the divisions.

Yvonne: I'm trying to make it so that it's less. You should meet my nephew. I mean he's been coming here since he was 17. And I said to him, "Well, this is what I'm going to do. I just want to hang out with you." And this Sunday Happy Day, he's brought anybody that he's dating. He's going, "Well, come to my Auntie's club." Just turns up with them. And he doesn't care. Because he goes, "This is my favourite club. It's my favourite club ever." And it is a good age for [inaudible 01:53:03] gay, and people's brothers and sisters, or work colleagues. And he's now got a really good understanding of what-

Evelyn: A mix of people.

Yvonne: Yeah. And I asked how he defines himself. He says I don't have a crystal ball. But it's very unlikely that I'm going to purposely sleep with a guy. But it doesn't mean I can't have a friendship. And then, he came to live here. And ended up living next to two gay blokes. And hangs out. But 30, 40 years ago, you just wouldn't think of inviting your nephew to your gay party. Somebody's parents might have had something to say about it or whatever. You know what I mean? For me, that's the bit that I feel that I've contributed. It may not be politically. ..But in terms of changing people's impressions of who I am as an individual, the fact that they can get beyond the fact that I'm a lesbian is quite an amazing thing really.

Evelyn: We've come a long, long way-

Yvonne: We have.

Evelyn: Over time. And you've lived a life out and proud, strong, claiming butch women as torch bearers along the way.

Yvonne: You might call me baby butch or something. Because, like I said, I do manicures and pedicure. I don't do painting.

Evelyn: It's not binary concept either [crosstalk 01:54:44].

Yvonne: It's about breaking down the expectations and bringing that whole butch thing, like I mean I've been brought up amongst it all. So I realize that any serious butch femme relationship is actually probably a far more healthy relationship than most other relationships. But the idea that you think this because this person is the butch that they rule the nest is... They have more-

Evelyn: Crazy, really.

Yvonne: It is really crazy. And like I said, you have to see this documentary that reminds me. Because it epitomizes. Because you don't see the characters. You just hear the voices. You see the house. And then, you get to some of those butches. They might dress in that manner. Yeah. I mean I'm using that as an example, because that's always been the biggest, well, not those ones. Because, well, she just needs a man or a pretend one. All that bullshit.

Evelyn: There's an old saying. Butch on the streets, femme in the sheets.

Yvonne: There you go. There you go. And I think that documentary portrays that quite well without you actually seeing who the characters are.

Evelyn: You must be exhausted. We've talked. It's been amazing to hear about your life. Just finally, that young, young Yvonne, back in the day, what advice would you give her?

Yvonne: I mean I guess I don't know if there's any advice. I think that I advised myself. Which was this is who you are so just get out and do it so everybody's happy. And it turned out they already knew. But I think I would go, just follow your gut instinct and find there's always somebody in that group of adults that you can go to for advice. I mean, in fairness, there are probably more aunties and uncles we can all go to, the younger generation can go to, than before.

But I had a couple that I didn't really make that, my brother Chris, who I didn't ever talk to about it. Turns out, he knew. But anyway, I would go, if there's one person that you feel would understand, it's good to be able to offload. And that doesn't have to be a teacher. I mean, like I said, mine really should have been Chris. Instead, I used my grandmother. But at least I had somebody. And a lot of kids, today, have at least got one person they can go to outside of parents. I don't know. I don't think I would do anything differently around my sexuality. Partly because that wasn't the issue. I mean I thought it would be an issue. But it turned out it wasn't really an issue. Because they already knew.

For example, I got to say, I almost got kicked out of the army. I had to ring my parents, "I might get kicked out." And the first thing my stepmother said to me was were you found with a girl?.. I was like that. "What? Hmm. Yeah." And she said, "We've known. We've known since you were 14." I suppose my difficulty was, at that time, most of it it was about it was deemed wrong. And therefore, you didn’t want to make life difficult. You didn’t want to take the risk that your parents might reject you and all that sort of stuff. Because, nowadays, there's so many more young people that have got one relative that's, some may have a little bit more, open about it.

The fruits of that is coming on. If there's a young person, I would say find that one person that you can trust to share your worries, your concerns with. Because if you don't have... It's just like kid turmoil in thinking that you're

weird. And then, you get all depressed. I think in this day and age, there's always one person out there or an organization that you can go and talk to. Salvation Army. Woodcraft. Girl Guides. No, that wouldn't work. Yeah.

Evelyn: Yvonne, thank you so much for sharing your life. I think there's many, many, many women in the community that owe you a debt of gratitude for providing the safe spaces and helping them to just be themselves. Get up every morning and just it's okay to be me.

Yvonne: Definitely, we never knew that Systematic, would have this... I mean if you talk to anybody that's been to Systematic, it was a safe haven for people to just coming in, experiment, being around different people, and be around black women, be around white women, and less that segregation. Yeah. I think, yeah, we made a great contribution. Still I think I am, really.

Evelyn: Of course. Of course. And the new place I'm sure will carry on doing that.

Yvonne: I hope so.

Evelyn: Thank you so much.

Yvonne: No worries.