

From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Frankie Green	Date: 26/03/2019 Age: 70
Key issues: Working Class. London. New Zealand. Colonisation. Gay Liberation Front. Butch/Femme. Women's Liberation. Lesbian. Feminism. Consciousness-raising. Non-monogamy. Squatting. Compulsory Heterosexuality. Women's Liberation Rock Band. Women's Liberation Music Archive. Section 28.	
Narrative summary Frankie's family emigrated to New Zealand when she was young. Later on she began to feel uncomfortable living in a colonised country; she began to develop a sexual identity and a political mind that took account of indigenous peoples struggles. She became aware of pubs that were known to be 'gay bars', through word of mouth. She met some lesbian and gay people and got involved in their subculture; she experienced queer bashing, stigma, and some of her friends underwent electroconvulsive therapy. She was drawn back to London due to the 'tradition' of a popular resistance; she was attracted by the Gay Liberation Front and Women's Liberation. She describes the main underlying theme of GLF as validity and visibility and moving from shame to pride. She was part of the women's group who had decided to split away from the main GLF group, and instead focus on putting lesbianism on the agenda. For Frankie, the move towards Women's Liberation came with a realisation that the oppression of lesbians was coupled with the oppression of all women. It took a while for lesbians to be accepted into the movement and for them to include within their demands for the right for women to define their own sexuality and end the oppression of lesbians. They had meetings, protests, riots, magazines, consciousness-raising, and set up communal living situations (often in squats). At this time, she had relationships that were often not very long lived, due to the ideological issue of monogamy and not wanting to replicate heterosexuality. She discusses the tensions within the different strands of feminism; whether this be radical feminists, socialist feminists, revolutionary feminists, etc. She talks about how she feels disconnected from many modern-day forms of feminism, which fail to take into account all oppression; i.e. class, race, sexuality, gender identity. She became involved in the Women's Liberation Rock Band. They wrote songs about their experiences at the time, and performed at Women's Liberation events and demonstrations. After 2000, they decided that this history needed to be recorded, so established the Women's Liberation Music Archive, and included as many musicians/bands/organizers who were active at the time, in order to preserve this history.	
	Length of interview: 1 hr 6 mins





Evelyn: Well, Frankie, 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?

Frankie: Yes. I had experiences as a child and young woman, which I think were fairly typical for women with my background in terms of moving towards a feeling of knowing who I was and being able to do things in the world, being the way I wanted to be. I lived in West London. My parents were white working class, hoping to be upwardly mobile people, and we emigrated to Aotearoa (New Zealand) when I was

quite young. New Zealand was a very similar society to English society. In fact, it was a deliberately created replica, really, and I found it very restrictive, very conservative, and it was quite a difficult place to live in.

Frankie: Then later on, I felt very uncomfortable about living in a colonized country, which is where I began to develop not only a sexual identity, but a politics, which took account of indigenous people's struggles and anti-racist struggles, which were important to me from the start also. So, while I was a teenager living in New Zealand, it was very difficult to be a lesbian because there was no ... There wasn't really a word for it, and it wasn't spoken about, but there was a kind of element of awareness that it was a shameful thing, and there was something about it that must've be spoken or expressed.

Frankie: I had a few relationships with boys and men, which varied between boring and disastrous, but my main sort of feelings of intensity were with women, either as friends or the kind of teenage crushes and intense friendships that girls had at school. Then I met a few lesbian and gay people, and there was a kind of subgroup, I suppose, or subculture that I was on the edges of, and we went to clubs and bars, and it was all quite subterranean. Sometimes I thought it was quite romantic, like being in a Jean Genet novel or something, but other times it was quite difficult.

Frankie: There was violence. There was queer bashing when we went to clubs, and there was a feeling of fear, I think, that was based on knowing that ... Well, for the gay men it was illegal to be gay, and for us women, the fear was more of being stigmatized and pathologized, and I had friends who were incarcerated in mental ... you couldn't really call them hospitals. We used to call it the bin, the loony bin, and the so called treatment was electroconvulsive therapy, which was a horrible tortuous thing. So, you couldn't imagine going to see a doctor or a therapist to talk about your feelings or your identity because you would fear that then you would end up being sectioned, basically.

Frankie: So, there was that kind of defining of lesbians and gay men as mentally ill, and also as being kind of freaks, really. We were thought not safe to be around children, and we were not fit to be parents. It was very difficult, and I think that even though when I came out more in the process of getting involved in the Gay Liberation Front, we worked through a lot of those attitudes, and we rejected them, obviously, but I think that, as we were saying, the legacy of that time, emotionally or psychologically, can stay with you and possibly always be there casting a kind of shadow, really.

Frankie: That sounds rather negative and depressing, but actually, in fact, sometimes I think that could be quite a positive thing because it can remind you of the need for solidarity with people in communities or places all around the world who are still suffering from those types of oppression, and we need to work to develop and support their rights to be out and to be open. And that's also a part of feminist struggle, to assert the right of women to have control of our own bodies, our lives, our sexuality.

Evelyn: If can roll back a little bit-

Frankie: Am I going on too much?

Evelyn: No, no, not at all. How did you find other lesbians? How did you recognize each other in those days when nothing was spoken?

Frankie: Well, in small communities I supposed you kind of knew somehow, and then you would maybe see people in social situations, parties and pubs and things like that.

Evelyn: Were there particular clubs or pubs that were more accepting for the gay community?

Frankie: Yeah, there was a pub down by the docks, which was always ... It was very full of life, actually, drag queens and dykes. Yeah, it was kind of quite exciting in a way, and then there was a pub in the city in which I lived, and that had a

bar which was known to be sort of a gay bar. Word of mouth.

[Evelyn:](#) Yeah. Was there a look?

[Frankie:](#) No, not particularly. Not at that stage.

[Evelyn:](#) Not that stage? Yeah.

[Frankie:](#) Talking about the '60s then.

[Evelyn:](#) Yeah. Yeah.

[Frankie:](#) In what we used to call sort of straight gay bars, there was more of a look because women would be into role playing more with butch and femme, and that could be quite conflicting if you didn't feel that you fitted into those roles, or you rejected them, as we did later in gay liberation. So, it's understandable why people played those roles.

[Evelyn:](#) But you never subscribed to. You never thought you fit that.

[Frankie:](#) No, I never felt comfortable with it, never identified with that, really, and later on we sort of actively rejected that idea, that you had to have this polarization, which was based on the kind of dualism of masculinity and femininity.

[Evelyn:](#) Absolutely. So, are we still in New Zealand at this point where-

[Frankie:](#) I'm just on the verge of escaping and coming back to London, yeah.

[Evelyn:](#) So, yeah. I think I'm probably interested in the comparison between New Zealand and London, if you are just on the point of escaping. Was this the same level of pathologizing when you came to London?

[Frankie:](#) Well, there had been, but I came at a very fortuitous time. I feel I was very lucky, and I had heard about gay liberation, and I think about the Stonewall riots when I was on the way back from New Zealand, and in Australia for a while, and the Women's Liberation Movement.

Evelyn: So, what years are we talking?

Frankie: So, this is 1970, '69, '70.

Evelyn: Yeah, so Stonewall riots was '69.

Frankie: Yeah. So, when I arrived back in London, the Gay Liberation Front had already formed here, and I was lucky enough to meet people straightaway. So, I was deliberately kind of steering myself towards woman's liberation and gay liberation, and I was very drawn to come back to England because I felt like there was a tradition of, a history of popular resistance, class-based resistance and feminist resistance going back through the Levellers, the Chartists, the Luddites, you know, and of course, the suffragettes and so forth, and I knew there were some groups already starting to work for lesbian rights. There was a group called ... They were called Sappho. I'm not sure of the dates. Organized by a wonderful woman, and there were other sort of tentative groups starting up as well.

Evelyn: So, we have a picture here. We have 1967, the Sexual Offences Act, which partially decriminalized homosexuality, and arising partly in the wake of that, we have Gay Liberation Front and some of the lesbian and women's movements coming. What was the Gay Liberation Front focused on at this point, when you were joining?

Frankie: Well, when I joined, it was the most fabulous discovery to kind of come into this incredible energetic kind of burst of activism. I mean, literally, to walk into the hall, a church hall in West London, and to just find hundreds and hundreds of people there, very exciting, buzzing with ideas. It was very welcoming. Women were in the minority, and people of colour in a smaller minority still, but I always feel it's very important that they are not left out of any accounts of that history. There were a lot of different issues being focused on, but I supposed the main kind of underlying theme was validity and visibility, and just going from shame to pride, basically.

Frankie: So, there were various subgroups working on things like ... There was the counter-psychiatry group working against the idea that we were all mad, and there was a street theatre group that was really exciting. There were reading groups and study groups. There was the women's group, and I went along to that, and that kind of overlapped with feminism and was really developing that quickly then. So, there's overlap between the men's interests and the women's in terms of working against stigmatization and the de-legitimization, I suppose, but the men also focused on things like the need for an equal right-

Evelyn: Age of consent.

Frankie: Age of consent.

Evelyn: Obviously, it was a very ... Was it a very young group?

Frankie: There were a few older people, but primarily, I would say most people were in their 20s and 30s, and there was a gay youth group, and that was involving teenagers and young people.

Evelyn: Was there a social side to it as well?

Frankie: Oh, yes. There were fantastic parties, fantastic dances and balls, and we would hold gay days in various places like Hyde Park or local parks, and we'd all just have huge parties. Yeah, it was fantastic. Then there was the first gay pride March in the UK through London. I think that was 1972.

Evelyn: I think so, yeah.

Frankie: By that stage, the women's group had met and decided that most of the women would split away from mixed general organization, and we had been together to women's liberation conferences. That was very exciting, putting lesbianism on the agenda, really.

Evelyn: Why did the women's group decide to split away?

Frankie: Well, it was a variety of reasons, and I think that what we had in common was a feeling that it wasn't solely negative because of the sexism that some of the men expressed, but basically that it wasn't our place anymore, that we would ... For many of us, not all of us ... I can't generalize. I know we were quite diverse, but for many of us it was moving towards the realization that the oppression of lesbians was part of the oppression of women generally, and that we needed more to take our place in the Women's Liberation Movement rather than a mixed gay situation.

Evelyn: How was the split? Was it amicable or rancorous?

Frankie: It was a bit difficult because some of the men were supportive. Some of the men were dismayed. So, it varied a lot, actually, but I think there was an understanding that that was a natural evolution, really, and part of the dialectical process, really, of just how the whole movement was evolving. I must say that I wasn't actually in the Gay Liberation Front for terribly long because of this. It was probably only about six months, and I didn't play a major role in it. I can't claim credit for its successes. I wasn't one of the people who formed it, and I owe credit to them for what they've done. But it was very important in my life because it was a watershed moment, and to meet lots of other lesbians, to be formulating new ideas and policies and ways of living. We started setting up communal living situations with a varied degree of success.

Evelyn: So, give me a flavour of some of those early meetings of the women's group that you went to.

Frankie: Intense, interesting, very focused on the actions we could take. For example, we went to Holloway Prison and demonstrated outside there in solidarity with a woman who'd been wrongly imprisoned. We also took part in quite a lot of mixed events, demonstrating against Bloody Sunday, that kind of thing, where there was a riot in Whitehall. That was exciting. The women's meetings were smaller, and there was a lot of discussion. I've got to admit, I can't remember them terribly clearly. I do remember the

first one we had when we split away from the mixed group and temporarily called ourselves Gay Women's Liberation to kind of show the overlap then. That was at a pub in Islington [the Three Wheatsheaves, Upper St.] It was a big group, probably about 50 women, and that was where things started taking off more in terms of autonomous organizing.

Evelyn: So, you were saying you went on to develop housing collectives, is it?

Frankie: Well, quite a lot of people were trying to set up different ways of living. We were rejecting the idea that we had to live in nuclear families or isolated and single in bedsitters, or have unwanted jobs in order to pay extortionate rents, and we wanted to live in a way that kind of set up alternative families, in a way. So, there was a lesbian commune. There were lots of men's communes, gay men's communes, and we tried to do things like sharing resources and being more communal-minded, really, and supportive of one another, and always producing leaflets and magazines, and going off to demonstrations and such. So, it was a very intense and busy time, quite exhausting, actually.

Evelyn: Was it a happy time?

Frankie: It was very mixed, actually, because there was a huge feeling of joyfulness and happiness and excitement when we were doing all these things, but it was also quite difficult because we all had a lot of baggage, you know, from the times when we weren't free to be ourselves, and we had a lot of political disagreements and personal disagreements. So, yeah, it was very mixed.

Evelyn: I can imagine it would get fraught at times.

Frankie: Yeah, it could get fraught at times, but it was always worth it, I think. I mean, I would change some of it. No, I can't say I wouldn't change a thing, but I wouldn't have gone without it in my life, because it really did change my life. It maybe

even saved my life. I don't know. I've suffered horrible depressions, probably as a result of that set of early experiences. So, it kind of came along and rescued a lot of us, I think.

Evelyn: So, at this time, were you in a relationship? Did you meet other lovely women?

Frankie: I met other lovely women, and sometimes we had relationships that often weren't very long lived, and there was a whole kind of ideological issue about monogamy, because of not wanting to replicate heterosexual relationships and marriages, so I had a kind of hodgepodge of relationships, really.

Evelyn: Yeah. I'm interested in how the feminist principles began to impact on your life at this time, as this is all growing. The kind of overlap between living a fuller life as a lesbian and really moving into all the women's issues at this stage. So, yes, I believe non-monogamy was quite big on the agenda at that time.

Frankie: It was, yeah. I think it came from very good motivations, occasionally, not wanting ... Not occasionally, generally, not wanting to be possessive towards one another, and as I say, not wanting to reproduce negative heterosexual patterns of relating, but it was also very difficult and very gruelling emotionally; developing, I suppose, or trying to develop an ethos of how to relate to one another. In terms of what was happening with the Women's Liberation Movement, there was a big overlap. For example, some of the squats we lived in, and we moved a lot between different houses, they would set up as women's centres, not in any formal sense, but we would just offer to do pregnancy testing and consciousness raising and held meetings for local women.

Frankie: The housing situation was very important because we wanted to assert the right of women to live how they needed to and chose to, not just lesbians, but all women. So, we would often help local women who were on the housing list, living in squalid conditions with their kids,

having split up from men or something, not pleasant like that. So, we would go with them to the housing office at the council or we would break into houses to assist them and support them to take over their own housing. So, there were quite a lot of situations where we'd be arrested or evicted. So, it was a very busy time, if you can imagine.

Evelyn: Busy time. So, tell me a little ... Because it's not part of the housing scene now, but a huge part of the housing scene then was squatting. So, tell me a little bit more about how that worked at the time.

Frankie: Well, squatting was a long-term right, which has been now illegalized by the Tories, adding to the homelessness crisis that we see today in 2019. So, in the '60s and '70s, there was a big squatting movement, and there were mixed squatting communities, and there were women's communities, often whole streets of women living in houses, into which we broke, empty houses, obviously.

Evelyn: I'm glad you clarified that.

Frankie: Yeah. No one was displaced. We would do our own kind of renovating of the houses, because often the council would've smashed up the interior. So, there were a lot of women who get very involved in manual trades. There were women plumbers and tradespeople, so we were able to do the electrical wiring and plumbing things.

Evelyn: It was a sort of apprenticeship for someone almost at that time that kind of-

Frankie: I think it was a huge learning curve. Yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: ... pushed them towards-

Frankie: Taking over our own lives and controlling our own lives and our material situations rather than waiting for someone else to do it or-

Evelyn: Which traditionally, it would've been men coming in and doing those jobs.

Frankie: Well, yeah. That's true. Yeah. So, this was very important. You'd be able to find out about the Women in Manual Trades groups doing everything from you know, as I say, wiring and plumbing to building houses eventually. So, this kind of overlapped with all kinds of other activities, really, because in the squats that we developed, we would hold a lot of meetings. We would have band practices. We would have workshops. We'd have a lot of women coming in and out every day to use the only bath on the street kind of thing, so it was very, very sociable, and it was also about taking over a space, a material place in which we could develop things. It wasn't solely about a living space with a bedroom. It was actually about claiming territory, I guess.

Evelyn: Roughly, what year are we now?

Frankie: Well, this went on in my life experience in the '70s and '80s, and then I moved out of the places I was living in in Hackney and left London for a while, and then women worked on setting up a housing co-op, became slightly more formalized because the Greater London Council at the time declared an amnesty on squatting, so it kind of became a little more settled sort of thing.

Evelyn: Excuse me. So, we're in the '70s and '80s. How are you subsisting at this stage? How are you ... Are you earning a living? Are you ...

Frankie: Well, I had lots and lots of different jobs, and sometimes I was on the dole because it was easier to live then on benefits than it is now, and my primary activities were not paid work because I was setting up bands and events and playing musical events. We also had a kind of salvage economy, I suppose, because we'd take an old pram down to the wood yard for fuel and stuff like that, and we'd subsist in any way we could, really, but amongst the communities I lived in, there were very different kind of things going on. Some women had professions as teachers, et cetera. Some of us were just living hand-to-mouth kind of thing. But in the '80s I got a job in Sisterwrite Bookshop on Upper Street in Islington, and I worked in the café there for

about 18 months, and then I decided to go back to education because I'd dropped out of school at 16. So, then I did a degree. That was very exciting.

[Evelyn:](#) What did you read?

[Frankie:](#) I studied humanities, or cultural studies as it's known now: mostly literature, but with a bit of history thrown in. I really loved that. Yeah.

[Evelyn:](#) Did that open further doors for you, or was it more of a personal development?

[Frankie:](#) It was more just from personal interest, really, and then I'd get work after that in libraries, which that helped towards. That's true. Because I'd really wanted to be a writer, so I sort of thought this would focus me on writing, and I also taught literacy to refugee women, and also helped readers in primary schools who were struggling. So, my work from then on was kind of based around word stuff, I suppose.

[Evelyn:](#) I'm interested ... You mentioned some of the women's groups. I'm interested. Maybe paint me a picture of some of the consciousness raising groups that went on at that time, which was a big thrust of the movement.

[Frankie:](#) Yes. Yes. There was a whole kind of network of CR, and it was a process and a practice that was seen as absolutely fundamental to developing the women's movement because it was about looking at our personal experiences in the light of an understanding that they were shaped and determined by the context, politically and socially, in which we were living. So, it was the beginning of that slogan, the personal is political. We came to understand how we were not just isolated women, whether we were lesbian or heterosexual, bisexual, who were undergoing problems. These problems were actually caused politically by structural oppression and inequality.

[Frankie:](#) So, there were a whole network of groups, and most of us belonged to some of them. There were lesbian consciousness raising groups I remember going to, and

there was a group called Lesbian Liberation at South London Women's Centre, which met for a while, and there was a whole kind of infrastructure developed also in the women's movement at that time, which was based on local groups, local women's liberation groups all over the country, and also with some international networking. So, it was quite a formal structure, within which there was a lot going on in terms of everybody's development, I guess.

Evelyn: So, cast your mind back to stepping into a room with other women for one of these groups, and paint me a picture of how it worked, what sort of things you did that you thought about and that you discussed.

Frankie: Well, it's hard to draw specific clear memories, I find, partly because it's so long ago, I think. Yeah, it would be generally nice and welcoming, and we'd be sitting around in a circle, and we'd maybe have a topic, or we would just go around in a circle and say what was happening in our lives and how we related it to what was going on in the world. Then we would also have the issues to deal with ... Anybody who's been in groups will understand this, a question of who gets to speak and who isn't so confident in speaking, so sometimes you'd have something called the speaking stick, which would be passed around, and if you held that you won't be interrupted, but neither could you go on interminably.

Evelyn: Yeah, to have them take over before too long. Yeah.

Frankie: So, there were kind of some formal mechanisms, and there's a very interesting paper called The Tyranny of Structurelessness, which came out at that time. You might know it, about how groups can become dominated by some people. So, there were lots of dynamics to be dealt with. It was really, it was very important, actually, and I don't think it ... It didn't sort of finish at the end of the meeting. We'd still go on talking and discussing things informally, whether you were kind of cooking together or you were going out to a demonstration, so we were always analyzing stuff and listening to other women.

[Evelyn:](#) You said that there were some clinics and things to support heterosexual women generally at that time. You were saying that you supported them by going to the housing office. How did, how did the two groups mix? How did the heterosexual women in the women's movement think of the lesbian women, and vice versa? Were there any tensions, or was it a perfectly amicable mix?

[Frankie:](#) That's a very big question. I mean, in terms of the housing thing that I was just talking about, that was just sort of word of mouth locally. I don't know how we did it in the age before mobile phones. Someone would come around and say, "Quick, there's some women with kids who have squatted a house, and we need some help because the police are kicking the door in." So, we'd just all go. So, that was very informal. In terms of structures of the women's movement and stuff, when the lesbians from Gay Liberation first went to women's liberation conferences, there would be quite strong arguments and difficulties. I think it took a long time to integrate the notion of challenging what came to be known as compulsory heterosexuality into the general developing of awareness within the women's movement.

[Frankie:](#) And we did eventually, um..There were some acrimonious meetings, but we did eventually have the ability to have the demands of the women's movement include the right of all women to define their own sexuality, and an end to the oppression of lesbians. So, we did manage to get that explicitly stated, and I look back on it now, and I think, well, the women's movement came out of a certain type of society in this country. I can't generalize about other places. So, inevitably, in a way, we weren't starting from year zero. We were going to bring with us all the sorts of ideas about sexuality and the stigmatization of lesbians, and ideas about racialization and class structures that, of course, we'd been living amongst. So, it's very hard work to try to deal with those things and sort of them out and challenge them, and there were some successes. Yeah. I think that it laid a foundation for development those ideas.

Frankie: But to go back to your question, it varied tremendously because some of the contacts between heterosexual women and lesbian women were personal friendships, long-lasting friendships, and some were situations that took place in meetings, and there was a lot of fluidity because many who became involved in women's liberation who might've come from heterosexual backgrounds would fall in love with other women or get involved with other women, or reject heterosexual relationships or leave them for various reasons. So, it was quite complex. Yeah, it was a very open-ended situation. It wasn't like we were necessarily in these rigid categories. I think for some women, that still prevails, and some of us would define ourselves, as I would, as a lesbian and a feminist with no doubt about the connection between the two, and um ...

Evelyn: Yes, because at the time there were some women who were, in inverted commas, 'political lesbians' because they were rejecting their heterosexuality even though that was a more natural state to them in some ways, and then they were forming relationships with lesbians. There must have been some tensions there.

Frankie: Well, I suppose there must have been. It's just too general a question to sort of specifically hone in on, really, especially with a bad memory.

Evelyn: But it was a time of enormous solidarity between women, which caused these barriers to grey out, if you like, to refer to [crosstalk 00:34:41]

Frankie: Yeah, I definitely think that it was a tremendously ... I mean, this was a mass movement, so it was incredibly complex, but it was also, as you say, full of amazing solidarity and very, very powerful, and it changed so many women's lives, and it had an impact on this society, and probably ramifications beyond, and I sometimes feel we haven't achieved what we set out to do, but then I think there's a ... I read an interesting thing by Stuart Hall, the cultural theorist, saying there's a distinction between a result and an influence, and we've had a tremendous influence, and I

think things have changed tremendously here for lesbians, and of course, for women generally.

Evelyn: So, what do you think, say, within the women's movement, what were your greatest triumphs, and what were the things that you still feel need addressing?

Frankie: Can we turn that off for a minute while I think? Because ...

Evelyn: So, feminism is a very broad church, if you like, and there were many strands within it, which tend to confuse me, so I don't know what your personal take is on some of the different strands within feminism.

Frankie: Well, that's a very interesting topic because ... I mean, my own personal experience, when I got involved in the Women's Liberation Movement, the strand of feminism that I was most drawn to was called radical feminism, and to me, this meant being able to develop our understanding of and our opposition to patriarchy and misogyny, and to understand how it intersected with other forms of oppression do to with racism and classism and disability issues, other forms of oppression, basically. That's how I understood radical feminism, that it was taking the term radical literally, meaning the root of women's oppression, and so it was kind of a contrast with socialism as I had known it in various groups, which focused more on economic oppression and women's oppression in terms of class and employment.

Frankie: So, I was excited by this because it seemed like you could develop an understanding, but I wouldn't say it meant rejecting socialism. To me, it was expanding it and moving on with it, really, evolving theories and action. But at the time, there was a tension between socialist feminism and radical feminism, and I think now the way I look at it, looking back, is that it might have made more sense for us to see what we had in common, because presumably, we all wanted transformational change and revolutionary change, not just an equality within the existing system of capitalism.

Frankie: What I feel now is what has happened is that feminism has become so co-opted and so liberalized and watered down that virtually anybody can call themselves a feminist. In this kind of pro-equality liberal form of politics, it's depoliticizing, de-radicalizing to the extent where you have the idea that there should be 50/50 representation, which doesn't pay any attention to the actual politics of the women involved. It's not feminism just because it's about women. If those women are right wing or racist, then personally, I feel no affinity with them whatsoever.

Frankie: So, I'd like to reclaim maybe the term radical feminism, actually, because lately it seems to have become assumed that it's synonymous with being against transgender rights, which I don't believe it necessarily is, and I think that may be ... Someone said to me, "We don't feel like using the term feminist anymore. Maybe we'll go back to calling ourselves women's liberationists, because what we want is liberation from all oppressive structures."

Evelyn: There were also revolutionary feminists. What were they all about?

Frankie: When I was involved in feminism in the '70s, I was involved with radical feminist groups, and we were developing ideas about compulsory heterosexuality, for example, how that intersected with all kinds of other issues, like women's employment. There is a fascinating piece of writing by Adrienne Rich called Compulsory Heterosexuality, which is very interesting, and sets off lots of discussions. In the mid '80s, there was a development called revolutionary feminism, but I wasn't really drawn to that at all. I found some of it quite dogmatic and quite simplistic, and sometimes kind of setting up heterosexual women almost as like sleeping with the enemy kind of thing, and I felt that that was not the kind of analysis I was interested in.

Evelyn: Was separatism an offshoot of revolutionary feminism or [crosstalk 00:40:57] itself?

Frankie: It was separatist feminist or different strands of it from the early '70s, as I experienced it, and I suppose I lived as a separatist for a while, but for me, it was never so much about individual separation from men, although that's perfectly valid, but about political autonomy, women's political organizing.

Evelyn: Absolutely. So, moving away a little from your political activism with a capital P, tell me a little bit more about your involvement on the music side of things and in lesbian bands.

Frankie: Yeah. So, I played in several groups, and they, well the first one directly came out of the women's liberation movement. It was called the London Women's Liberation Rock Band, and it was a mixture ... It was open to all women to play. We had a workshop situation where loads of women brought their instruments along, and out of that came a sort of distinct lineup, and we played at women's liberation conferences and things like that. There were other bands forming as well, and this was ... It wasn't like wanting musical careers to develop exactly at that stage. It was more to do with wanting to make our own music, express our values within the lyrics of the music and the way we perform. So, again, it would be non-hierarchical, a bit like the meetings we had where there wasn't one person or this group of people sitting up on a rostrum or platform or something.

Frankie: We'd be kind of all on the same level, and we would be making music for women celebrating and dancing, as I say, at conferences and meetings, as well as national conferences at that time. There were lots of regional conferences, and there were also conferences around specific issues like women in health, women in housing, that kind of thing, the National Abortion Campaign, all those kind of things. So, we'd play sometimes at demonstrations, and we kind of overlapped with lots of other different rock bands, the Stepney Sisters, the Northern Women's Liberation Rock Band, other great groups, and later on I was in a group called Jam Today, and it was a much bigger band,

and we played a lot of conferences and events for about two years before I left and the band went on with other women in it after that.

[Evelyn:](#) You played the drums?

[Frankie:](#) I played the drums and wrote some songs. We tried to work collectively, so we would write things together and practice together and spend hours talking when we were supposed to be rehearsing, talking about the political issues of feminism and music making. It was, again, a very exciting productive time, really interesting. We would sing songs about women loving women, and sing songs about taking over houses and squatting, and that kind of thing.

[Evelyn:](#) So, it reflected all the different aspects of your life at the time.

[Frankie:](#) It did. It did. It brought it all together, and much later, since probably around the turn of the century, I'm still in touch with quite a lot of those women from that time, so we all felt we should really make sure that history is kept and recorded somewhere and celebrated. Otherwise, it's another situation where women's achievements and activities are hidden from history. So, we set up the Women's Liberation Music Archive, which is online, and tried to make sure we included as many musicians and organizers and bands as possible in that.

[Evelyn:](#) Was there a huge number of bands at this time? What was the [crosstalk 00:45:03]

[Frankie:](#) There were loads, actually. Yeah, yeah.

[Evelyn:](#) What sort of styles of music?

[Frankie:](#) Lots of different genres. There were folk musicians and rock musicians and funk and punk and jazz. It was very, very productive, and it was part of a whole cultural flowering that took place and grew when the Women's Liberation Movement started in this country, because I think all political movements have cultural elements, be it protest

songs and theatre groups, that sort of thing, and art, visual art. So, all these things were going on, which I felt really excited about, and it meant a lot because, as you say, it expressed the values of the movement, especially through things like leaflets and fliers and graphic art and posters, were very, very important. The See Red Poster Collective, for example, did wonderful work, produced masses of posters about the demands of the women's movement and various issues. A very exciting time.

Evelyn: Yes, I'm getting a feeling of youth and energy from it all, and excitement, and a lot of love, I guess.

Frankie: Yeah. Yeah, and great fun, a lot of seriousness, but also tremendous fun and, well, joyfulness, really. It was like a big sort of a liberatory time.

Evelyn: The music side of things, did it impact on kind of the mainstream music scene at the time very much, or was it very more of a subculture?

Frankie: That's an interesting question. It was more of a subculture in a sense that ... I mean, it was an integral part of the women's movement, and it impacted upon the mainstream music scene in terms of other women becoming musicians and forming women's bands, often dismissed as an all girl band or something like that. So, there were women dealing with sexism in the straight music industry as well, and within the women making music in the movement, there were women who wanted to have, you know, their own careers and develop professionally, and be able to make a living and make music outside of the movement, and there were those of us, probably more like me who just wanted to make political music. So, it was very varied, and it was productive.

Evelyn: And good fun. So, over quite a long perspective now, how have you felt that attitudes have changed over time, or do you feel the attitudes towards-

Frankie: Towards lesbians, or ...

Evelyn: Particularly towards lesbians, I think, have changed over time. If you think back to your 20s and now, do you feel there's been a sea change?

Frankie: There has. There's been a profound change because of the political organizing we did, GLF and the women's movement, and various groups and organizations. We did see a cultural shift, and we've benefited from that tremendously through the work of a lot of people. It's also ... Because there were great sort of surges of resistance from time to time, I think that GLF enabled us to develop a basis on which to fight Clause 28 in the mid 1980s, which was this draconian piece of Thatcher's legislation, which was part of a backlash against our rights and our struggle.

Evelyn: Which impacted largely on schools and-

Frankie: Well, it was primarily about stopping any kind of pro-equality moves within education, but it was also about suppressing the development of lesbian mothers who had asserted the right to have children without men. I think it was basically the anti-patriarchal aspect of it that they couldn't stand. The Tories, right wingers in general, and fundamentalist Christians sort of came together with this bill, but although we didn't win against it at the time, it was eventually repealed, but much later. We mounted a fantastic campaign and set of actions, and I think that had a huge effect also, kind of as a next wave, as it were, upon the attitudes that we have now.

Frankie: I think through, yeah as I say, the hard work of lots of people, we do have a different situation in which I can live openly with my partner, and lesbians can be out in various places and professions, and we don't have to fear losing our children or our homes or our jobs like we used to. Um, I have mixed feelings about marriage equality, because marriage wasn't really on the list of demands back then, but I actually think that all the legal rights we can get hold of we need to do so, and to fight for them, and I think it could make a change in social attitudes. I'm very aware while I'm saying all this, for a lot of women, it's still not possible to be

out and to live a lesbian life, and to live with other women, and that's within various places in this country, but also around the world, situations are absolutely horrific, and there is still the death penalty for male and female homosexuals.

[Frankie:](#) So, it's kind of a mixed bag, isn't it? I mean, it's such a kind of patchy picture if you look at it globally, and I do believe very strongly in internationalism and international solidarity, so I can't think to myself, well, everything's sorted now, and I'm really happy. If I wanted to, I could marry my same sex partner, and at the same time know that there are asylum-seeking lesbians from other countries who come here and are imprisoned in Yarl's Wood and/or deported back to those situations where their lives are in danger.

[Frankie:](#) I feel very, very angry about that, and I feel that therefore there is so much still to be done to combat that whole hostile environment that's been created towards those women and to asylum seekers in general. So, it's very upsetting, and I think those of us that have ever experienced a hostile environment of some sort should have fellow feeling in solidarity, and women are doing fantastic jobs. There are great lesbian organizations who are working to protect and support lesbian refugees, for example. So, that's an ongoing struggle, isn't it? Something else I was going to say. It's gone out of my head now.

[Evelyn:](#) So, you've got a situation now where personally here in England or in the UK-

[Frankie:](#) I know what it was. Yeah.

[Evelyn:](#) Attitudes seem to have moved substantially.

[Frankie:](#) They seemed to have moved, but don't you think ... I feel we have to be vigilant, and we have to always be prepared to fight all over again because there are always those patriarchal forces, religious forces that want to keep women in their place, which is always heterosexual and

subordinate to men, and therefore, we have to be ready to mount campaigns and show solidarity, and at the point of time that we're doing this interview, there's a situation where pro-equality education in schools is being threatened by the action of some fundamentalist parents who are opposing the idea of equality, which is very angering and very worrying because you can't trust this Tory government to oppose that and to stand up for LGBT rights- [this refers to the reaction to the No Outsiders school programme – see <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/04/birmingham-school-stops-lgbt-lessons-after-parent-protests>]

Evelyn: Because in many ways-

Frankie: ... and it's also very worrying for the children who may be LGBT or T within those communities who are being told yet again, as we were, “You have no right to exist. These feelings are not valid. You will get married. You will do this and that, as we say,” totally authoritarian patriarchal values, heterosexism all over again.

Evelyn: Because we're mirroring Section 28 with this.

Frankie: It feels like that is a resurgence of the Section 28 mentality.

Evelyn: We need to invest in future members as a community so that they don't grow up with the shame.

Frankie: Yes. Yes, and to educate other people so they don't grow up to be bigots and sexists and perpetuate violent structures against women and gay people. I'm saying gay people. It's interesting because the terminology is really interesting, isn't it, because there's this ... I don't know who dreams up the acronyms, LGBT, for example. I've heard some people say, “Well, why is that being used?” We weren't consulted, and a lot of people aren't comfortable with being lumped together like that. I used to feel, for example, when the lesbian and gay groups were set up during the 1980s, that it was a bit of a step backwards. I felt disappointed in that because, as I say, when the women left the Gay Liberation Front, it was about setting up autonomous lesbian

organizations and working with other women, and we felt our place was with other women.

Frankie: So, that seemed to me like a backwards step in a way, but that is me personally. If it suits other people, I don't want to sound like a liberal, but I'm far more tolerant now ... if other people want to operate under those kind of umbrella terms and do coalition work, then that can be obviously really, really valuable, and it was very valuable in Clause 28 because women, lesbians, did loads of autonomous actions, brilliant things, but also, there were mixed events and heterosexual allies, of course. So, I've got kind of mixed feelings about all that now, and in fact, it's taken me a long time to feel okay about having mixed feelings about things because I used to feel GLF was such a long time ago, and it wasn't really for me, or mixed gay things were not for me, and LGBT was never an umbrella term that I felt that I'm a part of, really.

Frankie: But I kind of feel, also, as I've got older that I'm more inclined to feel like integrating, and feeling okay about, all the different parts of my own personal life and history, and seeing how important they were. I mean, GLF was not just a stepping stone, really. It was a fantastically life-changing movement, and I'm really grateful to the people who set it up. They were very brave. A lot of them were men who had been persecuted or imprisoned. There were women who had always struggled, people who were older than myself, so had struggled even more. So, I'm rambling now.

Evelyn: I think what you're saying to me is recognizing that diversity within our community, a community which has always been there, and there have been tensions between lesbians and gay men, and there are currently tensions around transgender rights. There's always been tension surrounding bisexuals, and yet we are a group of non-straight people.

Frankie: That's an interesting way of putting it.

Evelyn: We have many things in common.

Frankie: It's a bit of negative definition, non-straight, but some people prefer queer, I know.

Evelyn: Some people, yeah. I'm happy with queer, but as you say, language is really important, and has always been really important in the movement, and-

Frankie: Yes, but it fascinates me.

Evelyn: Yeah. People feel very differently about how they are described.

Frankie: Yes, and I think that I can understand why a lot of people, especially lesbians and feminists, don't want to be included under the term queer because we feel that it subsumes lesbian identity in the same way that the term gay did or does, but at the same time, I feel sometimes it can be quite useful to younger people using the term queer because they, like I did when I was young, feel totally alienated from this society and the expectations that are put upon them to conform to. So, I understand that feeling of being queer as well, and I think maybe we just have to use the terms that seem appropriate at the time, really, but I do think it's very important to insist on the use of the word lesbian because it couldn't be said, and our existence is still under threat. So, I say that whenever I can.

Evelyn: All right. Is there anything that, thinking about the interview, you felt you might like to talk about that we haven't discussed?

Frankie: I can't think of anything at the moment. Shall we have a bit of lunch and then come back to it, or how's your timeframe?

Evelyn: I'm fine. I'm fine.

Frankie: Okay.

Evelyn: We can pause for a little, if you like.

Frankie: Let's have a little pause.

[Evelyn:](#) We'll do that.

[Frankie:](#) Then I might think of-

Evelyn: So, we've had a little break and just before, we were thinking about.. I was wondering if there was anything you felt you might want to talk about that we hadn't touched on.

Frankie: Well, it's very interesting because it's clarified for me a few things that I felt strongly about, more instinctually, actually, than intellectually, 40, 50 years ago and I now feel still important politically to me. About lesbian activism and feminism and I think I said that the strands of political activism in both gay liberation and women's liberation that I'm most involved in, [were] of the more radical or revolutionary transformational change movements. The thing about GLF was it was so carnival-esque and threw everything up in the air and it was really about transforming everything and similarly in the women's movement. So, I still feel that those are the things I am committed to and when I do get involved in any groups or actions, then they're the more radical kind than.. things that I don't really feel I was working for all those years ago like equality in the military for women or gay people, well I'm anti militarism, so I'm not going to support that!

Frankie: But, I feel quite strongly still, as I've mentioned, about international solidarity with other people and I've sort of taken a stand occasionally against, for example, there was a stage, I think it was about three years ago with the Pride March in London, having been on the very first Pride March in 1972, and there was a move to have a contingent from UKIP and I was absolutely incensed about this because that's not what I fought for. That a racist group could be part of this movement. So, I kind of had a letter in Pink News and stuff like that about it and generally protested and tried to get the point across, "This is not acceptable."

Frankie: And the other issue that's arisen recently that I've been involved in is anti-pink washing or No Pride in Israeli Apartheid. Because in some situations, now that gay rights have seen to be a good thing to do, then some oppressive regimes will kind of hijack the rights we have fought for to try to cover themselves with glory and make out that they're progressive and modern and civilized as opposed to the people that they're oppressing, in the case of Israelis and Palestinians. So, a whole movement sprang up that you may have hear of amongst queer people in Israel themselves and queer Palestinian people of opposing this use of gay rights to try to camouflage the fact of the oppression they were imposing on dispossessed people and their occupation.

Frankie: So, that's been very exciting because there's been a lot of support for that from international figures and groups. So that's something I was more recently involved in, trying to establish that LGTB rights have to be allied with progressive rights of all peoples and not solely just about getting equality for a few of us within a rotten system.

Frankie: Oops. Cups of tea have arrived.

Evelyn: Thank you.

Frankie: Thank you.

Frankie: Yeah, so that's kind of what I've been involved in lately.

Evelyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Interesting.

Frankie: I went on the 40th anniversary of the first Pride March in London and there was a big anti-pink washing contingent on that, solidarity workers. So that was exciting.

Frankie: And one of the most great things that happened was you were talking about Gay's the Word, lesbian discussion group and they had some representatives from the lesbian group of Palestinian women called Aswat and they came over and talked and that was really, really exciting. To make that kind

of connection and to broaden it out into the wider political issues about, really, the international order of things.

Frankie: So it's been exciting making contacts with women like that.

Evelyn: Absolutely. And that's sort of, from your very personal side of things, to the broader political stage has obviously been something, a theme throughout your life.

Frankie: I suppose it has, really. Yes. I think that was the ...

Frankie: Oh, sorry. Why am I apologizing? I dropped my own glasses! [inaudible 00:05:14]

Frankie: Actually, that was something that's very prominent in GLF. Because it was happening at a very exciting point in time, of anti-colonialist movements and the anti-apartheid movement, and national liberation movements and black liberation, civil rights all around the world, so it was a part of that. It wasn't just an isolated phenomenon and it felt itself very much a part of that. So, it was possible to start making those links, really, from that time.

Evelyn: So. Looking back, if you think back to young Frankie, maybe in New Zealand or maybe walking around the block three times before you went into a lesbian club-

Frankie: Yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: What would you say to her?

Frankie: I'm not exactly sure. I'm very lucky. Things have turned out very, very well for me, really, that could've gone otherwise, so I guess I would've just said, "Don't despair, just keep going. Be as strong as you can but accept it when you're not feeling strong, but just have a bit of faith and follow your instinct, your intuition. And follow your heart. Be as true to yourself as possible and don't be afraid."

Evelyn: Yes, I think a lot of people would concur with that. So Frankie.

Frankie: Probably give myself the same advice now.

Evelyn: Yes. There's still a way to go.

Frankie: Always.

Evelyn: All right. Frankie, it's been an absolutely privilege listening to some stories from your life. And I've learned loads today. It's been great. Thank you so much. So, this has been an interview for the project From a Whisper to a Roar, which is an oral history project conducted by Opening Doors London and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. And we have recorded it on the, what date are we today? The 20 ...

Frankie: 26th, is it?

Evelyn: 6th.

Frankie: 26th ...

Evelyn: Of March.

Frankie: Of March.

Evelyn: 2019. Thank you so much.

Frankie: It's been a pleasure to meet you. Thank you very much Evelyn and anybody listening in the future, I hope all is well with you. Thank you.