



a car. My brother said, come along to the folk club, so I did. I went to Charlie's WEA lectures at the Birmingham Midland Institute, and that's really when I met John and Douglas and Barbara. I went to a workshop and got involved that way, and that's the way it's been ever since really.

Q: What was your brother's name?

DF: My brother, John – another John.

Q: Tell us a bit about Charlie's classes at the institute.

DF: Oh gosh, that's our doorbell. I don't know whether it was a series or what – they blur in my memory. Charlie talked about really the work he was doing with Ewan, if I think about it. They'd been recording for the traveling people and he played recordings that they had made of singing style. It tied in with something that had happened to me when I lived on the Mediterranean. There was a folk club in Valletta in Malta; I lived on Malta. I met a girl from North Umbria and we were talking about folk songs and she said they used to have old singers come to the club. She said, the first time I heard this old lady I laughed, she said, and when I heard her again I wanted to cry it was so beautiful. Of course that tied in. I remembered what she had said, when I listened to Charlie. Really I wanted to learn more. I've always sung ever since I was nine. I've always been in choirs, church choirs, choral societies, operatic societies, you name it. I sang abroad, I sang with the operatic society and a church choir, I sang with Turves Green Operatic. I sang in college choirs and I've always done it and always been able to read music and play the piano and things. So moving into folk songs seemed sort of the result of it all, a culmination of it all. Charlie was a very appealing speaker. He was an eminent person of course, a BBC producer, but he was so easy to understand. He never talked down to people – many learned people do, don't they. But Charlie didn't do that, he just disseminated his love of what he'd been researching. So I can't remember all the details but I can remember he played Lagan Love, the Irish singer. I don't recall her name; it'll come in about five minutes, but you know who I mean. I do remember he played that and I do remember I was absolutely enchanted.

Q: How was Banner formed?

DF: What a question. We got married in '72, the Christmas. Before that, about 18 months to two years before that, Roy Palmer had been researching the carpet weavers' strike and he'd written a play, *The Funny Rigs of Good and Tender Hearted Masters*. Sorry, Maggie Barry was the Irish singer, I knew it would come. I was in that and so was Sean, and it was through that that John and I got talking and he asked me out on a date, and from there it just progressed. We got married in the December but the Grey Cock then members who'd been in *Funny Rigs* of course, who'd got that theatrical experience. I'm not quite sure of the background to this. I don't know how Charlie met Rhoma but Rhoma was the head of drama. She had done recordings of George, the folk singer in the black country, and some of his songs are in the Midlands songbook. I think she had been involved with that recording. She must've somehow met Charlie and there was a spark obviously. She was incredibly creative. Ewan gave permission for them to have the script of the *Big Hower* as a one-off production. It was only ever meant to be performed once. I think they just asked people who were interested and the way you think, oh yes I'll have a go at that. We all had a meeting down at I and Hertfordshire where Phil and Charlie lived, and it sort of came together. We just stayed there for the weekend, as far as I remember, and off it went.

Q: Who was involved?

DF: Who was involved? Charlie, Rhoma, let me think. Richard Hamilton, Mike Turner, Eileen, Dave and Chris, Joan Santana, Joan Smith, Julian and Linda Rath, I can't remember more names. Roger Broskow may have been in it; Roger Broskow came to Turkey with us. There were many more people. I think in total when I added it up at one time there were 40 people in the wider Banner group; 40 is a very big number for an ad hoc theatre group. Not everyone was in everything. We did it under the auspices of the Birmingham Midland Folk Club and then we got more bookings. Chris had Katie so we must've got up to about 1974 or '75. I fell pregnant and that's partly why I haven't got a memory, and then I had Nick followed by Townsend. We went around in a van with our nappy buckets, believe it or not. We took the children with us when they were tiny. Then we had a creche, I can remember we had a creche in Dave and Chris's house. I don't know when Dave and Miriam got

involved, but it became too problematic. Also, children like their own beds, they have their own routines and have to go to school eventually. It's all a blur because we didn't get any sleep for seven years, because my son didn't sleep and Townsend didn't sleep and we didn't sleep. My mother was dying at the same time. We'd get these phone calls to say, your mom's had a heart attack. My mother's health was horrendous, the consultants said, because of really the unintentional physical neglect of her childhood. They'd say, your mother's dying, we don't think she'll live, come. We'd go and they'd say, we tried this drug, we never tried it before, it works, and mom would be up there with a cup of tea. She had the first heart attack the day I found out I was pregnant in '75, so really seven years on from '75 mom was very ill. But it is a blur; I've not got down dates or anything.

Q: What was it like to be on tour with children and a big group?

DF: The group, many layers. I was mostly concerned with Julian and Linda. We ran a crew bus then because previous to then we'd set up and run with Douglas and Barbara and two other people, a place to take children on weekends because lots of our school children never had holidays – terrible really. So we took a hiring on a school in Hertfordshire and we'd take children to her every weekend or we'd take them camping.

Q: School children?

DF: School children, not my own children. We stopped when I had my own children; I couldn't cope. I was used to camping and getting on with things. My mother was crippled with arthritis triggered by pregnancy. She got rheumatoid arthritis in all her joints, so from a little girl I've had to do a lot. My mother couldn't pick up a teapot or anything, so I'd done a lot in the house and so did my brother. You just had to get on with things, stop moaning and get on with it kind of thing. I was used to that kind of life. Mother wasn't cruel and father was lovely, but that's the way I was brought up. So doing Banner and coping with the kids, you just got on with it. We got burgled in the middle of it as well. The police said, did the burglars do this or do you always live like this? I had to say, it's always like this. By this time Charlie was living with us. When he was in Birmingham and he wanted somewhere to stay, he'd have our little bedroom. Then of course when his relationship with Rhoma developed

he'd stay with Rhoma, but until that point he stayed here. Did Charlie stay with us until we had the children, John? I think it overlapped a bit. As I say, it's all a bit of a blur. But Charlie would have our bedroom. It was interesting when we got burgled because his equipment was of the top quality. The burglars didn't touch his stuff. They couldn't get rid of it, could they? It was too specialized, so it all stayed.

Q: The years you describe, can you attach shows to those?

DF: Oh gosh, I've tried in my head because I thought you'd want the chronology. My daughter was born in 1978 in December, and that was the year Banner went to Berlin to do the race show. I was involved in writing the race show with Dave and Charlie, and we did most of it here because I'd got Nick, who was two. I can remember doing was it super sell, the women's show? We did Collier Laddie and after that came. . .

Q: After Collier Laddie you had a few street theatre short shows.

DF: Yes, about the post office and Chile. I didn't do those.

Q: Then you had Fields of Vietnam in '75. Woman Kind.

DF: Woman Kind, I couldn't remember what it was called. Terrible, isn't it? I do remember doing one show and hearing my baby cry all the way through it. I wasn't involved in the street shows, mainly because I'd got children. Also, the roof was leaking and we needed money, and I was doing part time teaching as well by then and using a child minder. It was a lot on my plate.

Q: You said you were involved in co-writing the race show. Was that the first race show?

DF: That was the first race show.

Q: Could you tell us about the processes involved?

DF: A lot of talk. Charlie was very well read, extremely well read. The important thing about Charlie was that he was a very experience person. He'd fought in the war, he was on submarines. He'd met a lot of people who knew and worked at a very high level in media, so he came with a very informed mind. Where was I working? I was then doing some E2L work I think, so I'd in-service training to do with my job. We did an awful lot of reading. I remember the work of Pom Dot, the communist historian, the Marxist historian. We had access to letters of soldiers in India, horrific stuff going on there. We looked at all the legislation to deal with immigration. You know Jacqueline, I really cannot put all of this into context and I feel very confused. An awful lot of reading, an awful lot of discussion, and the recordings of course, listening to the recordings. I did some transcribing as well. Dave wrote some smashing songs. I can't remember how we hammered it out, the format of it; I really cannot remember. It was very intensive, extremely intensive, and I suspect most of the work was actually done by Charlie because he'd got the experience. You're dealing with someone of his expertise. We got recordings of George Gordon and the Indian workers association, I want to say Barat. I met a lot of people. I can't help you further than that.

Q: What motivated the group to take on the race show?

DF: I'm not sure how Charlie met George Gordon but he worked at British Leyland and they operated quite a racist selection for working on the line. I think that was a trigger. It was also, you have to look at the background of what was happening in society. The national front was getting very vocal. I can't remember dates; I wish I'd kept a diary. But certainly they wanted to hold a meeting in Handsworth and the local Rastafarian boys saw them off. They were the so-called Handsworth riots in 1980 what, I can't remember. But it had a devastating effect on the community. I found out, someone in my antenatal group, she was married to an alcoholic rotten apple policeman who was violent. She left him in about '78 or '79 – she and I had children the same year – because she was so frightened for her life. But what she told me was that when they're going to throw policemen out of the police force at that time – it might not be true now – they would send them to Thornhill Road Handsworth. Thornhill Road has always had – because we've been here since '72 – a dreadful reputation. Of course you really need your best policemen down there, not your worst. Apparently the disturbances started with just a couple of kids outside the police station. But the minute it

went on the media every rogue in the West Midlands came to have a go in Handsworth. There were disturbances in other places in Birmingham but I think they focused on Handsworth because it was multicultural. I'm now looking at, I can give you a date now. My son was at the nursery so it would be about 1979 or 1980. I was a community worker then, I was working at the community school. One of the Rastafarians, Ozzie, a great bit six foot odd bloke with huge dreadlocks, wonderful man, he tried to stop kids joining in. The police picked on him and took him to court, and I think one of the deputy heads went and gave a character reference at court to say he was trying to stop the kids joining in. But they still sent him down and sent him to Winson Green. It's shocking. I have heard that many of the people convicted were not from Handsworth, and they were white. We still have the effect now living in Handsworth from what happened 40 years ago, the derogatory comments I get from people when they say, where do you live? I always say Handsworth, always say Handsworth just to see what they'll say. I get the most awful comments even now 40 years later. I say to people, have you ever been to Handsworth? They say, on no, I wouldn't go there. I say, well how can you talk like that? But sorry, we've diverted haven't we. But Banner was against this background. Oh and has anyone mentioned the project in Soho Road with the school children?

Q: The Handsworth Project?

DF: The Handsworth Project. I was involved with that. Sorry, I've got no sense of chronology.

Q: The Great Divide, I understand that in the initial critique it was criticized for not being very progressive. Do you remember any of that?

DF: Yes I do. It goes back to a time when Banner, when we wrote the shows we took it back to the people who'd given us the recordings to get their reaction. When we were writing the show we wanted to use some of the offensive terms that black people had to deal with, and we put them into the show. The feedback was that even though they saw what we were trying to say, it was very negative and it shouldn't be done. So we took them out. That's what it was all about. My daughter-in-law is Polish and the day after the Brexit vote after

the vote was announced someone told her, I voted to leave so that people like you would have to go, so fuck off. My lovely daughter-in-law buying a cup of coffee. So things don't change much, do they? But no, that was what that was about and they said, take it out, so we took it out. It didn't work dramatically and it was offensive.

Q: Did you work on both the original and the rewrite?

DF: Well I can't remember. As I say, for me everything was a blur; I was living on about three hours sleep all the time. I didn't perceive it as a real rewrite, it was that that's how Banner worked then. It was just part of the creative process.

Q: Can you tell us more about that process?

DF: Not really, no. Things changed. If people said, like we just shouted out these awful words and they said, no. The feedback was really it doesn't work, it comes over as you being racist not you trying to show what it's like. As far as I remember, there was no big discussion – if it doesn't work, take it out.

Q: The script evolved.

DF: It evolved, yes. I thought that was a very useful thing. Later on when Banner became a core group and people came in from outside, they stopped doing that, getting feedback from the people who contributed. When I asked why I got my hand verbally slapped, if you know what I mean. So I felt like we'd lost something, we'd lost it. The whole concept of Banner was giving people back themselves in a positive way. But once you stopped giving it back and getting feedback, you've taken out that layer.

Q: Any other changes?

DF: I can't remember. I know we took the show to Berlin obviously and that was an extraordinary week. Has anyone talked about it? It was an extraordinary week. We were invited to appear, and I don't quite know how we got there in terms of the preparation. We

were invited to appear in a drama festival in West Berlin, and off we all went with our props and our suitcases. It was a festival where fringe groups like ourselves from all over Europe were invited to appear. There were people from Naples, street theatre from Naples, and they were extraordinary. We watched their performances, we talked a lot. Thank goodness they spoke English. It was absolutely mind-blowing. We saw films. I just wish the whole of Banner could've been there, not just our group. Bill Shreve of course was in Banner, I forgot to say that, Bob Etheridge. It was quite extraordinary. The dramatic skills were extraordinary too. We were not actors or artists, we were just amateur singers, musicians and actors. At times we were clumsy and awkward. There were some extraordinarily skilled people there and I learned a lot from watching what they did – their faces, their hand movement, and the subtleties of drama. You don't have to sit and shout at people to get a point over, you can do it in such a clever way. They must've told you about the news reader at the table. An Italian group set up a round table with a cloth over it and a man who's a news reader. He has a sheet of paper on the table and he picks one up and he starts to read the news as we get it, bland, on the television. Then a hand comes up from under the cloth and just puts another sheet of paper on top, so the news reader picks up the next paper and reads about, there's a strike, oh puts it away, and then picks up the next one and reads some bland news. Then the hand comes up again and talks about, I can't remember but it might've been about corruption. It was so clever and it was so quietly done, very clever. I can't remember the details and I kick myself for not keeping a diary. They were extraordinary days. In fact, to be blunt, the whole of Banner was extraordinary, and the folk club as well.

Q: In what way?

DF: They were an extraordinary group of people. Charlie was just a wonderful man. His bigness of heart and mind you don't meet very often, you don't. Generous of his time, of his knowledge, of his learning and his experience. He could be totally infuriating. The day he, we are not amateurs, threw his file down the room. He could erupt in a temper. But looking back, he was dealing with a lot of egos, because young people have egos. We were young in our heads, some of us. He must've got very impatient with people who couldn't see, couldn't understand. We all came from different roots to Banner. There were some people who were very political, went to George Thompson's lectures. There were people like me

who came from a standard labour background, CND supporter, feminist. We were a mishmash, and Charlie really was the glue that kept us together intellectually and emotionally. He was a superb man, a lovely man and loved families, thrilled to bits. He adored Katie Rogers; we called her the Banner baby. Katie was our baby. She used to come on the bookings. It was lovely, absolutely lovely. He adored families. So Charlie really was extraordinary and the people who gathered around him. You look at the talent. John Wrench, superb guitarist. Mike Turner, superb guitarist. Pam wasn't involved because Pam and Allen were in Manchester, that's why they weren't involved. Chris, wonderful songs written by Chris, many of them completely ignored afterwards. They were a clever, talented, intelligent, lively group of people to be with, not your everyday group of people. They were really quite wonderful.

Q: Renata?

DF: Renata, I don't remember much of Renata. We lived here in Handsworth. Lots of people didn't live here, they lived over Mosely and Kings Heath. So we got missed out of a lot of things because we didn't live over there. We never went to France, for instance; we were never asked to have French people here. I don't know why, I really don't know why. This sounds awful, but people who live at Kings Heath and Mosely think that Handsworth is the other side of the earth. When I met Renata once in Canondale Park once she said, you've come all the way over here. So we were cut off, John and I, and Lynne and George of course, because they're further out. So we got missed out of a lot of things, we just did.

Q: What about events like the camping trips?

DF: I went to a couple at Tallybot. You were there when Tansy was a toddler. I've always camped, I like camping. It's quite difficult when you've got tiny children who don't sleep, to accommodate other people as well. You've got enough going on in your head. I'm not a natural earth mother, I've never been a natural earth mother. But after a while, and this is in dangerous water, but after Marian Harper got so objectionable over the women's show, we got excluded from a lot of things. She said that I was responsible for her not being asked to join the women's group, and I had nothing whatsoever to do with her not being asked to

join the women's group. But she used to phone me up. I've got my mother dying, I've got two kids who didn't sleep, and Marian phoning me up telling me I was to blame. Well I can't hack all that, so we never got asked to go on some of the things. When I tried to talk with other people, they refused to listen to me – Kevin Pratt, Renata, Richard, Allan Bishop. What do you do? You just have to ignore then really.

Q: Were you involved in the writing of Woman Kind?

DF: No, that was Chris and Dave, Rhoma and Charlie. I think Chris's children were very young then. What I can't remember is when Banner became a core group. We used this huge group, we certainly did Collier Laddie, they did the street theatre, Dr. Healy, but then Banner got project funding from the arts council; I can't remember when that was.

Q: They got funding from West Midlands Council. It would've been late '70s. Charlie brought Fran Rifkin into the company, and the main group was beginning to emerge.

DF: It was necessary because Banner was getting... I was asked to join the core group but obviously there was no way. Also, the roof was leaking and I needed to pay for a new roof and had to go back to fulltime work. But it wouldn't have been something I would've coped well with, I wasn't the right person for that. Banner I think was getting so many requests to go and perform, it needed a group that could work together and a smaller group that could be more movable. You couldn't move that large number of people around and do lots of bookings. There was the research group at Corby of course when Mrs. Thatcher wanted to close down the steel works there.

Q: That was in 1980, which was shortly after the Handsworth Project started. Your chronology might've gone from performing in community plays, and I don't know what the last one was before Handsworth.

DF: I can't remember. What you probably need to bear in mind is that the folk club was on Sunday night and the workshop was on Monday, then you'd have a workshop for the group you were in for the folk club and then you'd be doing one or two performances with Banner.

Then I also sang with Charlie and John Wrench; we were doing antiracist sort of collections of songs. I remember doing a gig with them at the university. So basically we were out seven nights a week performing, and trying to remember all we did was quite tricky. The Handsworth show was very interesting indeed, because that was supposed to be a show about the history of Handsworth. You know all this, do you? We had a lovely group of teenagers from one of the local schools and we put a show together with some songs with Chris. I remember taking Nick along as a toddler. We did a booking the other side of the city. We used to drive them there in our cars. The kids were very excited and they talked a lot. On the drive home they were dead silent, no one said a word. Normally they're as bubbly as can be. Not a word, and in the end I stopped the car and said, what's going on, what's wrong? They had had racist abuse. We got back to the school where we were meeting and all the kids had had the same experience; it was horrible for them. That's when we decided to change the show and we did a show about racism, not about the history of Handsworth. Then you know about going up to Telford with Chris. We were invited to, I don't know whether it was a festival or whether it was just us at Telford, and we'd got the only black children on the site. A local group, I don't know how it started, I wasn't there. I know one of our boys pushed someone he thought was a boy and it turned out to be a girl, and she told her parents. I think the police came, so they hauled off our children, not the local children. Chris had to go to the police station, and it was nasty. Very unpleasant for them, very unpleasant for Chris. Left a nasty taste in your mouth. But I can't remember the date again. About eight years later I met Edwin from the Handsworth project, and he said hello. By now he was sort of six foot two, stunningly handsome young man. I didn't recognize him at all, isn't that awful? But that was a very important project. When we talk about what we did, we have that social background all the time. Chris, one of the things I feel very strongly about is that Chris has been almost airbrushed out of Banner, and yet her contribution was enormous. One of the important things about Chris is that she's such a mature person, so that when tricky situations come up Chris handles them with maturity and compassion and intelligence. She's done that all the time I've known her. I've known Chris as long as I've known John, and I've never known her different in over 40 years. I felt she got a raw deal when the London group joined Banner. They didn't understand what she was coping with, with two small children. They can't have had any money. They were working in schools as well but they certainly didn't get well paid for it, yet she contributed so much artistically –

her music, her songs. She brought to Banner a great leveling, I felt, of how one behaves in a group. Other people didn't always behave well; she behaved well. People who hadn't got children had no idea of the work involved having children. Chris had to do a lot. I really feel that her contribution to Banner has been underestimated time after time after time. She's very modest about it, very modest indeed.

Q: How would you recommend her contributions be recognized?

DF: Just to be there. The songs she wrote, the scripts she wrote; she was involved in a lot of the scripts. I wasn't in Chile or the post office, for reasons I've said. Collier Laddie was a given script from Ewan, Woman Kind she was involved in. I don't know about the others because I wasn't there. Certainly her name should be on what she's written. Her photograph should be there. I'm sorry we've lost so many, but I would like it to be acknowledged. I went to a, where did I go? I cannot remember. There was a display of photographs of Banner, and Chris I don't think was in one of them. There was a whole roomful of photographs and Chris wasn't in one.

Q: Do you know what the event was?

DF: I cannot remember, I cannot remember. I just felt, this isn't fair, it's not just.

Q: How long ago?

DF: Oh c'mon girl, a lot's happened to me. I really don't know. I've been retired 20 years, before I retired, so over 20 years ago.

Q: Well this project is about redressing the balance and people who have been critical in Banner. I'm hoping that Chris will tell us that herself, but I would like you to tell us what you feel you contributed to Banner.

DF: Very little, very little. Honestly, very little. I learnt more than I ever gave. I'm an indifferent player of music, and better now than I was. I felt I could act but had terrible nerves. I don't think I contributed that much really in effect.

Q: Yet you mentioned the Handsworth Project.

DF: I suppose in a way I saw that as an extension of my teaching, the community work I'd done, my scouting work. I like young people, I think they're fantastic, and I liked working with them.

Q: The Handsworth Project has got next to no profile in the historiography of Banner.

DF: What I have got is, well when we thought it was going to be a project about Handsworth, I wrote an odd ode along the lines of Stanley Holloway. You know the odd odes, Albert and the Lion and that sort of thing, that Stanley Holloway wrote. Well I wrote one about Handsworth and I handed it to Dave, who improved it. I found a copy, I've got a copy you can have. That's all I've got, I haven't got the script of the show unless it's in the box of course.

Q: Tell us what the project was about.

DF: We wanted to do the history of Handsworth. We're looking at about 1978, '79. We worked with children from a local comprehensive school, teenagers. We wanted to use their talents. We didn't perform, they performed. We wanted to use their musical talents of course. Edwin was a superb guitarist, the young man. I'm trying to think, because we started with looking at the historical material. I can't remember the kind of show we produced, I only remember the awful treatment the young people had had and how we were all devastated by it. Naomi was involved – Naomi, Chris, myself, and certainly one of the men but I can't remember. Perhaps Dave was.

Q: Pete was involved in the early days.

DF: Pete was involved in the early days. The core group would've been elsewhere, that's right. We used their experience as I seem to remember, and recordings. It wasn't a long show, good gracious me. I think it changed their lives and at the end of it Naomi gave a party for them. Someone must have talked because then her house got burgled, not by the children who were in our project, but they must've talked at school. They have a friend who has a friend, and Naomi got burgled, which was a shame. But it didn't reflect on our children, they didn't do it. I can't tell you any more really about it.

Q: Do you remember Kids on the Dole?

DF: No, I wasn't involved with that. I went back to fulltime teaching in 1982 just because we were desperate for money, we really were. We were terribly hard up, him and me.

Q: Do you remember when you left Banner?

DF: I'm trying to think what happened. The children, because they didn't sleep, it was quite tough for us. Bernard was the administrator and I went back to help Bernard, and I was given money to pay for childcare, which was wonderful; I had a baby minder. I don't know how long I did it for, not all that long. I worked for Bernard for quite a while, and that was the time when Charlie died. That's extraordinary, isn't it? No, Charlie didn't die then, that was later. I must've worked about six months. I went to meetings, I did letters, I did admin in the office. Then I went back to work in '82 and that's when Charlie died. I must've gone back to work because Nicolas was six or seven. Nicolas couldn't believe Charlie had died, he wouldn't believe it. I think he was quite upset, because we'd seen a lot of Charlie of course. When I went back to work, and I would like this on record, I used to give £10 a month back to Banner, because I've been criticized for taking that money for childcare. I've had a couple of people say I shouldn't have been paid for childcare. But I did give money back to Banner – it wasn't a lot, but I didn't earn a lot – every month to Banner. I did it for quite a while. But the thankyou letters would come back, Dear John, and in the end I thought, oh Banner, if you can't even recognize that the cheque is my cheque with my name, and I stopped, which was probably childish of me and not very mature, and I'm sorry about that and I've always

regretted it. But I did try to give back some of the money to Banner that I'd taken out, but as I said, I have had criticism from people.

Q: What was that about the childcare? Banner had a kitty for childcare?

DF: No I don't know how, I can't remember how the money came to Banner, it probably came out of the general pot.

Q: But what was the system in place?

DF: I was given so much money to pay a child minder for so many hours.

Q: Was that for any performer?

DF: No, it was just for me to do administration work. It was just for what I paid the child minder. The child minding rates in Handsworth were very low because child minding rates are what the local social group can afford, and it's lower in Handsworth. That's how it works.

Q: It had its share of problems with the company, didn't it?

DF: Yes it did. It's very difficult for a company that has ideals in the real world to live up to the ideals, because the real world is very harsh. That's the way it is, isn't it?

Q: How were the shows received? Who were the audiences?

DF: The audiences, we were commissioned I think on the whole by trade unions.

Q: What was the link with trade unions?

DF: I suspect trade union officials, having seen the show, would pass on that this company does this. There weren't that many. 784 were the big name then, if I remember, and I went

to see some of their shows – far more professional than us. We were always I think an amateur group, but then what's wrong with that? Most of the feedback I remember was to do with the race show and to do with the women's show later on. The women's show, the feedback was tremendous, it really was wonderful. But then I think women do give a lot, if you see what I mean. I think people were glad to hear the alternative viewpoint. Does that make sense to you? They were glad that we were raising issues that concerned them, like Dr. Healy, the cuts. I don't remember from a general audience negative. The only negative comment I ever really remember, we were all in black and people found that very off-putting. It was very stark dramatically. We did wear black, because people hadn't got a lot of money, they just hadn't. So we wore black trousers, black tops, the women wore black ballet pumps. And the props were the colour. So I on the whole remember very positive response, because no one else was doing what we were doing. Does that make sense?

Q: What was it we were doing that was different?

DF: I think we were linked directly with trade unions. We were using the words of the people on the ground, we were using their experiences. We weren't giving them a middle-class overview. We were saying, this is what you've told us, this is what you're saying. Of course it tied up with the visuals, the photographs. It was quite tricky I remember when we were doing the script, selecting what you put into your script from your actuality, from the recordings, in order to make the point. You don't actually have a lot of time to say a lot of things, you've got to choose pertinent passages. But I think the aim of Banner was that people should have themselves back, they should recognize the value of what they were. That's really why I was so proud to be in Banner, because I've always despised the way that working class people are portrayed in the media. I come from a working-class family where education was valued, my parents loved music, they brought classical music records, they had books, they learned Esperanto. My father represented the union at a conference in Switzerland, he learned French to go there. They were not well educated, they'd been denied education, which is why my brother and I were encouraged to go as far as we could. But they were cultured, they had educated themselves. Yet when I see the working class on television, we have appalling morals. Believe me, in my family you didn't have appalling morals, not with my mother and grandmothers. They were honest, they

worked hard, they helped their neighbours, they helped their community. They didn't swear. They had standards that are never there on the television. But Banner put the working-class background I knew on the stage, and I liked to see that dignity and respect given to people from my background. Yes, I was proud to be in Banner because I recognized people that I came from, my mother's family. No one in my family beat up their wives, everyone cared for their children, and I wanted to see it there. They were concerned about what happened in the world. How did we get onto that, I can't remember. But yes, that's why I was so proud to be in Banner. John decided he would go on the committee, that's right, he went on the management committee. I decided I would perform with the women's show, and that's really when our role in Banner changed. John went on admin, I went back to work, I was in the women's show, which I thought was the best show Banner ever did. It really was wonderful.

Q: How?

DF: We talked about the background of racism, no one ever talks about the background of sexism. I'll tell you the story of the local horticultural club to illustrate it. The local horticultural club had a colour bar. The local labour party – and I was in the labour party then – decided that they would picket the horticultural club to remove the colour bar, and that's what they did. Then black men could join the horticultural club but women still couldn't, and the local labour party wouldn't picket it for women to join. I've met so many people who were so proud of being antiracist, particularly men, and who are so sexist it's unbelievable. We had that in Banner. The women's show we researched it, we wrote it, we did the photographs, we wrote the songs, we drove the bus – we did the show, and it was wonderful. Empowering I think is the word that's used, but it was wonderful, it really was. The feedback from the women we performed to, it was just stunning. It was the best bit of Banner ever, it really was. I can't remember all the names of people who were in it.

Q: Was it part of the main group, rather than the core group?

DF: I don't quite know how it came about because I just got a phone call one day that said, Doreen, we're forming a Banner women's group to do a show about women; would you like

to join? I said, oh yes. That's all I know about how it came about. Mogs, Marian, Chris, you, me, Miriam, Val, that was it. Can't remember.

Q: I don't think I was in it.

DF: Are you sure you weren't?

Q: I was in France at the time. Mogs was in. When Mogs decided to travel to Latin America for a year or two, I was just coming back to England. I came back to England in 1982, so I was asked if I could step in. But prior to the women's group I wasn't involved in Banner.

DF: Well it was absolutely fantastic. Look what happened to it. One day we were told it's not going to exist anymore. No consultation, no discussion, you were just told you're not doing it anymore. I still feel extremely angry about it. I don't know whose decision it was, I don't know why the decision was made. I just know that, like some sort of employer who's decided the workforce are redundant, we were made redundant. It was the most successful show Banner ever did financially. It's called cutting your nose off to spite your face.

Q: I don't know the history to that. The women's show carried on with different people over several years, didn't it? There were several different plays. I went back to college to study arts admin and when I left some other people joined.

DF: The women involved to keep the school open. I was still in it then.

Q: So I don't know what happened after that.

DF: We were just told one day, it's finished, you're not doing it anymore. That's all I know. We were just told that we weren't doing it anymore by the core group, by Dave actually. Very sad, very sad. See if you can piece it together. That's really the end of my association with Banner with the performance side of it.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

DF: I would like to say they were an extraordinary group of people and it was an extraordinary time. When you've got people like Bill and Bob, who'd been in Centre 49, it goes from Centre 49; Joan Smith, who had the first folk club in Birmingham. We tapped into all that expertise, all that knowledge, that skill. Everyone had something that they could bring to the group. Not everyone was multitalented in everything, but everyone had something that they brought to the group. It made wonderful whole. I said I was angry about the women's show the way it ended, but looking at Banner over all those years, it was quite amazing. I wouldn't have changed any of it ever, and I just feel incredibly lucky to have been part of it. It doesn't happen to everyone. It was wonderful. There you are, that's the end of it now, you can switch off.

[ END ]