

## NICOLA GIBSON LCVA INTERVIEW

00:00	NICOLA GIBSON
00:05	MAKING FILMS WITH PEOPLE, NOT ABOUT THEM
00:10	I grew up in west London in suburbia and I think I had a desperate desperate desire to get a get away from that. And I think for me going to university was like being born again, being politicised, living a life it wasn't circumscribed by values that didn't make a lot of sense to me.
00:32	SUSSEX UNIVERSITY IN THE 1970s
00:37	I went to Sussex which was in the seventies which was absolutely fantastic. It was you know liberal highly politicised the women's movement was you know absolutely at it's strength, Rock Against Racism, Gay Rights and it was just sort of like leaping in to this place where I sort of thought oh this is me, this is what I want who I want to be. I mean I had a good time educationally but I think I was lucky you know I got a full grant, didn't do much work, didn't have to, but it was about becoming somebody, you know, which is so different now. And that's what was so great then, that it was about personal learning rather than what kind degree you got and I think it really really changed me. I loved becoming political in a way that you know has never left me. It's not a sort of party political thing it's a broad sense of what it is to feel motivated to help change your own life, to help change other people's lives. And I think that that's where I started thinking about community, politics um how to engage with other people and thinking about impact. I remember going up to London, you know stopping in National Front marching in areas of London, and they were sort of exhilarating you know it was actually thinking about people being able to prevent something or change something and being on large demonstrations was a feeling again of God you know together you're stronger together you might be able to affect change. And it was that feeling that you could, something was going to happen, that if you did things things would change. And that was really a belief and I think it was to some extent a reality then and that's something that has just you know the older I've got and you know where I think about where we are politically, I don't have that belief anymore, but I did then. And so the highlight was just feeling that we were always on the brink of something new happening.
03:03	JOINING THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

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03:08	<p>The women's movement was about, you know really personally exploring things and seeing that you know the political is personal and the personal is political and I think I'd always been, I'd always wanted to be a feminist you know I grew up with a great sense of feeling wronged, a great sense of always having to shut up and I wanted to do the opposite. I think I was quite angry. I think I was confused and so the women's movement was actually I can talk, I can speak, there are other people saying exactly what I think. Talking about things that I felt so there was a great sense of unity but actually interestingly and I thought about this recently. I think the women's movement actually involved quite a lot of struggle, because you know being a woman didn't immediately mean that you were bonded with all women. It was a time of thinking you know all those factions: class, race, sexuality all became issues and you had to kind of work your way through that. And I think that that really began to give me an understanding that you need to think about how you are with people you need to think about who you are. You can't just assume that we're all the same or that we think the same thing. And I think all these realisations, all these beginning to get involved with different people different movements set me up to when I left university thinking that that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to work with people, I didn't want to get into a 'straight' job, I wanted to be involved in activism. I wanted to engage personally and politically.</p>
04:55	<p>USING VIDEO AT A COMMUNITY ARTS WORKSHOP IN KEMPTOWN, BRIGHTON</p>
05:00	<p>When I first left University I got involved in a community arts workshop which er was fantastic and it had a darkroom, it had video equipment, it had a stage and I used to, I got a job incredibly and when I think back it was arrogance, but I got a job working with something called intermediate treatment which is where you worked with young people who had to come on a Wednesday night or a Monday afternoon and do an arts project as a alternative to going to the young offenders institute. But I did video with them, and made videos with them and I think was really intimidating at the beginning I was thinking oh God. But they were so amazing and there was something about doing using video with young people who had had a very different life to me, who needed to express stuff just as I had had an easier route at university needing to express stuff and had had that good fortune, this project, you know what they would talk about, how they would use it to role play, to express emotions that were very very difficult to be totally creative. I think they surprised themselves at how much they enjoyed it. Also I did photography with them you know go out take pictures, develop pictures with them so it was a lovely, lovely first job and that really really gave me the impetus to think about you know this this is what I want to do.</p>
06:38	<p>THE BENEFITS OF VIDEO PLAYBACK</p>
06:43	<p>When I left university everywhere I went hand video equipment and I just loved it and I loved that whole thing about the instant ability for people to recognise something, do something and play it back. And I think it you know lends itself not only to expression in the moment but I think that thing of playing back is also invaluable because you know a lot of people, you know you don't get a chance to think about what you achieve in life very often. And I think that you know all the sort of different communities that I worked using video, the essence of what was so wonderful about using video was that people could immediately at the end of an evening or, they could look at what they've done. And I think that's incredibly motivating.</p>
07:36	<p><i>WHOSE DISABILITY, 1982</i></p>

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07:41	The project came about in terms of wanting to see how you could work with people who didn't usually have the opportunity to express themselves and to use video to see whether they could engage with something that gave them a voice. Tony Steiger had left university with me and he got a job working in social services as a team clerk. So an admin post, he knew that social services had video equipment and so he asked to borrow it and to initiate this project working in a day centre for people had different levels of learning disability and even physical disability as well. And they gave him the equipment and we used to go down I think it was once a week on an afternoon which was kind of like a workshop exploring the use of sort of games, role play, sort of drama therapy really, with this very mixed ability group and then talk about it afterwards what had happened and also talk with staff and get them to see whether it changed people's behaviours you know within the day centre or you know people benefiting from it or it wasn't benefiting people. And so the sessions would try and build on that.
09:01	It was that feeling of wanting to explore something and wanting to empower. Actually you know bringing something that was creative, giving people a means to express themselves and I think in in a day centre with the best will in the world you know a lot of people don't get a chance to express themselves, you know you're sat there, you're always in a group and you don't challenge either yourself or other people. And I think that or your behaviour is seen as challenging if you don't fit into the sort of polite norm the members of the group loved it because and it was incredible I mean has such senses of humor. They have such a sense of self which you know when you first go in you see a group of people who seem to be sitting quite passively or looking like they're not fully engaging. You know they, once they were using the camera or they were in front of the camera, you know, it all started happening and as I say there was this one woman I think she called Dawn who, she could speak but she wouldn't speak, and she saw herself on the camera and went 'it's me!' And I think it's actually in the film but I mean it was it was that kind of feeling of like oh my God you know it prompted something quite profound and then just people talking about who they were, what they liked, it was it was a absolutely lovely, lovely um job to have.
10:30	I think because it was so successful there was such an uptake in this day centre and by the people that wanted to come to the group that you know that the title Whose Disability did become something that we genuinely did believe. You know it's like well whose any better, who's 'more able' in this group than anybody else actually. You know we participated in the group, um sometimes you know members of the day centre filmed, sometimes we just left the camera on a tripod and all participated, sometimes we would film. So it was, it was a kind of great experiment that we were part of. We had in fact had a monitor um and so people could see at all times what was happening, and again I think that was something about again trying to be democratic.
11:19	Often you're making film 'about' people and I think you know that's something that I felt really strongly about even then that I never wanted to do that. I was much more interested in making films with people or using what people wanted to offer rather than say 'what I want to do is for you to do this..'. So I think having the ability of people being able to see themselves on a monitor meant that at all times they could take pleasure in seeing themselves as being part of something, not us having great pleasure showing how successful or good what we were doing was separately to the people that were giving us their time and you know their um interest.
12:10	THE LEGACY OF <i>WHOSE DISABILITY</i>

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12:15	<p>I then went on and worked with two organisations. One was Action Space London Events one was Shape Arts and both those organisations, at the core of them was about using arts activities to engage and to politicise the work of working with people who had you know disabilities or you know were vulnerable. All of whom, to a certain extent, were then necessarily excluded from the mainstream. And so I think it was you know Whose Disability was like a sort of beginning, I'm not saying it was the beginning of... but for us it was the beginning of that step to wanting to do more of the same. It was about challenging people's assumptions of course about what is disability. Just because if you have a physical you know er issue doesn't mean to say you know you're any lesser of a person. And I think sort of getting people to express themselves was a chance to show actually the incredible passions and preoccupations of people that haven't been listened to. You know it could be I'm sure seen as sort of patronising and... but at the time it was a very genuine thing about let's try and talk about what we're doing as we're doing it and you know we were very young, we were very inexperienced you know we weren't trained therapists or social workers, we were um fledgling community artists.</p>
13:56	<p>ACTION SPACE LONDON EVENTS</p>
14:01	<p>I decided I was going to leave Brighton and move to London and so I got a job it was called Action Space London Events and I think it had been something that had been going since the '70s, I think it started in the early 70s. And it was an organisation that was doing exactly what I was interested in, which was about using arts or notions of you know working in the arts with people in local communities or in sort of community projects to not only sort of organise and sort of politicise people but to personally explore whether you could make the notion of art something that was relevant in broader the broader community.</p>
14:53	<p>People always say don't they 'Oh I've book in me' or you know 'I could paint that' and I think community arts was about go on then, here you are, here's a space or here's equipment. An absolutely uncynical view of that you know what you got may not have been masterpieces for want of a better word or you may not have been polished projects but actually they are born of exactly the same thing: people investing, people displaying themselves in something that they've created, something they've produced. So Action Space was something I thought God when I heard about it I though brilliant and you know how lucky to have got the job. And um most of the work I did at Action Space was with children so it would be kids who had learning difficulties, had physical disabilities and it was very much usually you know game orientated because of the age group, doing dramas but most of it was, it was kind of anarchic actually, you know. But again it was for a lot of kids that was brilliant actually to have a camera rolling and you know a lot of playing up to it and playing with it and integrating it in to events.</p>
16:15	<p>There's always an assumption isn't there, it's like oh you know, young people are awful and oh bring out a camera everyone plays up to it. But actually you know with community arts people didn't really play up to the camera. They might have done initially but it was usually out of embarrassment but actually once you established a rapport there's something about that video camera because people can see themselves that actually they don't play up, they talk to it, hey you know work with it. And that's quite incredible when you think about it, because it does then you know when you're working with people it's like having an absolute assett you know something else that you have that you can look at, use and you can give people a product: this is what you did, this is what you said, isn't that amazing.</p>

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17:06	SHAPE AND THE CHANGING FOCUS OF COMMUNITY ARTS
17:11	<p>Shape worked with again this notion of working in schools, prisons, day centres. Working with people who were excluded, people who you know wouldn't traditionally have arts activities offered to them. But once I started working for shape I think really the whole notion, community arts changed slightly. The use of the video became more therapeutic, it became something that became integrated into the process of working with people, rather than using the camera to create a product. So they would always have something that they could refer to but by that stage I'd stopped making films, you know that I would have any aspiration to use or um. And I think that that took me then in another direction really of sort of seeing this as an extension of communication rather than um yeah. Community Arts was quite focused on having a product, which then you know your archive has got lots of fantastic examples of really great community arts, and then there must be so many other tapes and um you know just lying around that nobody ever thought to do anything with.</p>
18:32	DEAF TERRORISTS Vs THE HEARING WORLD, 1984
18:37	<p>One of the projects I was asked to do at Shape was to work with a group of profoundly deaf people to help them realise a drama that they wanted to make. It was quite a mixed age group actually of people who were profoundly deaf most of whom had been deaf from birth and they were very politicised around signing. I used video to record the process of creating this drama and at the end of the three months that I was contracted to work with them there was a performance of, I think play was called 'Deaf Terrorists' and it was about them kinda storming the barricades about you know that sign language was a language in its own right it's not only speech that is valuable. I had somebody who worked with me because I was the only person who wasn't deaf, which was interesting. That was interesting in itself actually, quite a learning. So I had to work very hard to work out how I was relating and so I had somebody who signed and I really quickly made, felt that I just wanted to be a facilitator because I could use the equipment and I could help organise this huge ambition to make a play, a performance around, it was kinda, it was sort of anarchy it was, you know deaf people subverting the hearing world and being sort of clear about the fact that they were sick and tired of being patronised and wanting to be taken ser, and that signing was valid in its own right. And so there was a lot of, you know scripting involved a lot of organising this group to come together to create and then perform this. But it was an interesting thing using video with a group like that and I think for them there was the satisfaction of having video there as as aide memoir but actually you know compared to when I think about Whose Disability or I think about other films that I made. They were very under, they were less overwhelmed and happy with what they saw. They would play it back, they would look at what they'd done, but in a way for them it was a way of almost as I say literally like notes. You know yes ok well that person came from here, well maybe they should walk, you know it wasn't sort of a fascination with this end product in the same way that the video had been before you know people sort of, it was such integral part and pride of seeing what they'd achieved whereas for this group it was much more you know the video was recording them but it was a more passive experience I think, they were just busy working themselves and I think that this was quite an alien concept to them.</p>
21:45	WORKING AS AN IN-HOUSE PRODUCER/DIRECTOR AT THE BBC

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21:50	<p>Community Arts dwindled as a movement and you know video got superseded. But I found myself in the '90s getting a job at the BBC and for a long time working my way up to becoming a producer/director there and making programmes about things, and about people. And that desire from community arts of working with people getting them to make stuff was very difficult to do in the BBC. 2004 I had the opportunity to work on a series called 'My Life as a Child' which was a groundbreaking series, which was giving small digital cameras, literally you know the size of a child's hand, to children between the ages of seven to 11 for them to record their lives. And when I got you know the opportunity to make this series it was like you know going back in time, it was like oh my God this is what I love doing, this is what I've missed. I don't want to make programmes about people, I want people to make programmes for themselves and then to be involved in helping people edit it and but it was like, for me it was so personally and professionally fantastic working on this series and in the first series I made eight programmes and we gave you know these young kids had cameras for up to a year and they as I say it was just unedited. The parents weren't allowed to tell them when to turn it on and turn it off. They weren't allowed to look at the footage. So we had this just, we had life, we had these children's lives and from it you know we made these programmes that had no agenda and sort of found themes within what these children had generated to shape into programmes which were transmitted on BBC Two. I made another series of 'My Life as a Child' for BBC One where sort of the edges were shaved off a bit and it had to be more accessible. But it was still the same principle with it was people, children filming their lives, and um you know don't really get that in television. You know there was video diaries back in the '90s and in a way this was sort of such a direct legacy from that, but it's what inspires me you know it's helping people tell their story and I do think that's really what I've always wanted to.</p>
24:37	MOVING AWAY FROM TELEVISION
24:42	<p>When I joined the BBC I absolutely loved it and I joined at the right time and I joined at a time when there were fantastic documentaries, because I was documentary maker. I joined when there were documentary strands there was Modern Times, there was Reputations, there was Inside Story and they were hour long documentaries. I started off on film um and you had crews and you had proper edit periods to edit programmes, you had executive producers who were there to help you not hinder you. And by the time I was coming to the end of my time at the BBC I felt I was being micromanaged which actually equals you're not trusted. It's all about, it was all about chasing ratings. You know if you were making a film for a certain slot you had to be aiming at six million or three million. Things had to be funny because they had to be entertaining. I mean I do remember making a documentary for BBC One about obsessive compulsive disorder and my exec came in to the cutting room and said 'it's not very funny, is it?' And it was like um no it's about obsessive compulsive disorder that's not very funny. 'You need to make it funnier and we need 3 million viewers at nine o'clock.' So the music had to become you know the voiceover had to be put on and I just thought actually I can't really do this and then I got asked to work on things that were, which is what we think of documentaries now, as you know format shows so factual entertainment and you know within three minutes somebody's got to have slipped on a banana skin and by seven minutes something's got to happen and there's got to be competition element. And you know I mean talk about one's original aspirations for people to talk for themselves to show themselves in the way that they want. It is so manipulated television now.</p>

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26:48	MAKING ORAL HISTORY AND COMING FULL CIRCLE
26:53	<p>And eventually I sort of moved slightly away from film and applied for funding to the Wellcome to get money to make an archive an oral history archive of people talking about the experience of a very specific experience about stillbirth and I don't really think it matters what what people are talking about. I think for me again what was interesting about the project was interviewing people but interviewing people within an oral history tradition so people answer the question in the way that they want to, in a way they ask the questions of themselves and they will talk about what they want to. Whereas for it all my sort of 12 years working at the BBC I was asking people you know I had complete control of an interview. Tell me about this, tell me about that, and going back to making this archive for the Wellcome again it was just this feeling of kind of this is where I started, this is about people talking about themselves, for themselves. I can craft it the same way that we could as community artists, we always somewhere intervened. They maybe people never realised that we did, but you did. And so I still like that kind of either that editorial knowledge that I have and wisdom that I feel I've gained, but you know letting people speak for themselves, letting people show themselves on film the way that they want to um you know is just has been a lifelong passion for me really. So the Stillbirth Stories project for the Wellcome you know exists now in perpetuity and it's people talking for an hour and 48 minutes about an experience, it's not edited, it's there for people to listen in whatever way they want and for people to express themselves in a way that they want to.</p>
28:51	END CARD