



Occupy Christchurch

In Our Own Words

Byron Clark

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"A lot of the criticism that found its way towards us was kind of like "oh you're destroying the grass, you're destroying the grass". I remember one line I heard was "the grass will grow back after the revolution" ... I think in the grand scheme of things the grass doesn't matter too much, when the ice-caps up in the arctic are currently melting"

"One person stayed there, and one person in a magazine wrote something and then the whole world eventually caught on. There was a revolution, but nothing like this before, is there? It's just incredible. I wanted to be a part of it, in a way, and that's how I stayed there for a while and off medication and homeless, Occupy held me and took care of me and I learnt to take it easy, I guess, and really be in the support of other people"

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Jesse Meek

Joanne Clark

Kassie Hartendorp

Ken Clark

Regan Stokes

Rik Tindal

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Introduction to the ebook edition

Many of us who participated in Occupy Christchurch knew that we were part of an historic event. At the front of the camp a world map showed the locations of other cities around the world where Occupy campsites had been set up, at each general assembly people would report on what they'd read about events in New York City, Los Angeles, Melbourne or elsewhere. Something massive was going on, and in that corner of Hagley Park, we were part of it.

The 2000s was a decade defined by the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, the drawn out wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the global financial crisis of 2008, and the subsequent austerity policies and bank bailouts. But the 2010s seemed to be becoming something different. A series of revolutions spread across North Africa and the Middle East in the Arab Spring, anti-austerity movements spread across Europe, particularly strong in Greece, Spain (where they were known as the 'indignados' - the indignant ones) and in Iceland.

When the Canadian magazine *Adbusters* put out the call to 'Occupy Wall Street' that idea of occupation spread throughout the English speaking world, as well into cities in Europe without already established anti-Austerity movements. The Occupy name was also adopted for some movements in the global south, such as in Nigeria. Of course, the global south was already full of movements resisting neo-colonialism and capitalism. In November 2011 Arundhati Roy wrote in *The Guardian*

“Occupy Wall Street has joined thousands of other resistance movements all over the world in which the poorest of people are standing up and stopping the richest corporations in their tracks. Few of us dreamed that we would see you, the people of the United States on our side, trying to do this in the heart of Empire. I don't know how to communicate the enormity of what this means.”[\[1\]](#)

Arguably it's still too early to know what affect Occupy Wall Street and the related movements of the early 2010s have had on the world, but in in Spain a political party 'Podemos' has grown from the indignados to become the country's second largest party in terms of membership, ending the two-party system in parliament. Iceland has jailed bankers who played a role in the financial crisis. Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek finance minister is spearheading a new pan-European leftist political movement called DiEM25.

In the UK, a left-wing back bench MP became leader of the Labour Party after a campaign that saw membership dramatically increase. In the United States, Bernie Sanders, a self-described 'democratic socialist' is at the time of writing, posing a serious challenge in the presidential race to the Democratic establishment candidate Hilary Clinton, packing rallies with people who agree with his rhetoric about "the 1%".

While New Zealand seems content with the country being led by the former Merrill Lynch banker who was first elected Prime Minister in 2008, there are signs that change could be coming. The opposition Labour Party, (who it should be noted introduced neoliberalism into this country three decades ago) are now investigating implementing a Universal Basic Income system, and as you

will see from the following interviews, those Hagley Park occupiers have not given up trying to change the world.

In the years following Occupy Wall Street social movements have emerged for causes that are not just economic. The queer movement has made huge gains, bringing about equal marriage in more countries, including Aotearoa. Now the movement is beginning to focus more on other issues such as the rights of transgender individuals.

There has been a resurgence in feminist activism that is currently reshaping popular culture and other areas of life. In the United States 'Black Lives Matter' is bringing about a new era of civil rights. Combined, these movements are reminding everyone that oppression is more complicated than the 99% versus the 1%.

Just as all history reflects the time it was written as much as the time it's about, this project has somewhat reflected the new ideas of 'intersectionality' different types of oppression that intersect with each other. I wanted to ensure that the voices of Occupy Christchurch would not be all male, or all Pākehā. Efforts have been made to ensure equal representation of women, as well as ensuring Māori and Pasifika voices are included. You will also read interviews with people who have experienced homelessness and/or significant mental health issues. Occupy wouldn't have been what it was without those people.

My hope is that this project will help readers understand what Occupy Christchurch was all about, as well as providing some guidance to future social movements, because there is still a lot of work to be done. As the 'hacktivist' collective Anonymous put it 'The beginning is near'.

Byron Clark

Jo Wildish

Recorded Seventh October 2012

Byron: So tell me how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Jo: I heard about it, I think I probably heard about it on Facebook, and saw that there was an organising meeting at the Linwood Community Arts Centre. I didn't go to the first organising meeting that I think they had outside the art gallery, but I went along to the second organising meeting and that was in the evening at the Linwood Community Arts Centre, and that was where I met people like, I think Regan was there -Regan Stokes- and a few other students who were kinda the original ones who said, "let's do something in Christchurch". There were members of Beyond Resistance, and Unite Union and, a few other anarchists and activists and socialists there as well.

Byron: And this wasn't your first involvement in activism?

Jo: Yeah, no. I've probably been around doing things in Christchurch for about 15 years. Originally with things like anti-GE and animal rights stuff and peace movement things, and then was one of the main co-ordinators of a lot of the, against the war in Iraq, action that was happening in Christchurch.

Byron: So did you stay at the Occupy camp site?

Jo: I only stayed once, 'cause with my younger children, who were at the time I think 6, 5 and 6, 7 sort of thing and it was quite noisy and we found that we couldn't sleep, and there was a film that kept playing and it was like a Zeitgeist film and it was really late at night and it was really uncomfortable in the tent, and it was quite light as well and um, yeah so that was the only time I stayed. We kinda planned on having other nights of staying but it just didn't end up happening in the end. We talked about having a women's tent there and having, on the weekends or something, a group of us who weren't staying there but were involved staying, but in the end it kinda didn't happen, I think it was kind of, a bit too late by that stage and a lot of people weren't feeling comfortable with being there. Which was one of the reasons we talked about having that kind of, women's nights there, but yeah.

Byron: So what were some of the activities you were involved in at Occupy Christchurch?

Jo: Mostly the GA's, so I tried to get to almost every GA, at the beginning I think they were happening every night, so I was probably going to about half of them. Further on they were having more, maybe every second night, I think we started having them every second night or three times a week or I think in the end it was once a week.

Byron: And what exactly was a GA?

Jo: A general assembly, so that's like a meeting, a consensus based meeting, where we would sit in a circle and talk about the things that we were wanting to plan or what was happening at the camp or issues were raised at the... so we could have discussion around the things that either we wanted to organise or the things that needed to be resolved, and a lot of it was working around safe spaces stuff we found, or yeah with issues with, drinking and things.

Byron: So that type of consensus decision making process at Occupy, did that work well for the movement?

Jo: Yeah I think it did, I think it was, for people who had not experienced that kind of participatory democracy, that they were able to participate within meetings, and have their say and things. I think that was really interesting, for some people it gave them that sense of empowerment that maybe they hadn't had before, being involved in decisions and making that kind of collectively. I think it worked well for, also for organising. So we organised quite a few demonstrations and activities and stuff like that, while we were there as well.

Byron: So what were the demonstrations that were taking place?

Jo: There were quite a few little ones, so there was, what were some of the ones that, I can't really remember... hold on let me think... can you remember them? [Laughs] there were lots, I did a human rights one which was fun, that's the one I can remember the most, but that was kinda near the end. There was the like, Robin Hood tax, but there were some larger ones the beginning?

Byron: There was a Labour Day one

Jo: There was a labour day one yeah, and there was a human rights one that was more of a parade, which was kind fun and dressing up and stuff. Then there were smaller ones like outside the police station as well, Oh there was some of the housing protest ones that we joined in, for the redzone, there were some protests in Latimer Square and demo's that we went along to, representing as Occupy.

Byron: So there was some sort of demonstration happening, what, every other week almost?

Jo: Yeah it seemed to be. And we had free-markets as well, Really free markets, so they were just big blankets with clothes and books and toys and things, the ones that we had the beginning were quite big, in the end we kinda had a blanket and just a few bits and pieces, and books and things. But there seemed to be a lot of storage happening at Occupy, and I think that was one of the things that was difficult for the Occupy in the park was that there was no running water, there was a lot of stuff being left there, there was also a lot of stuff going missing, but I think that was within the confusion of there being so much stuff stored, and I think sometimes people stuff might have been put in the free market as well, because that was put out every day and there were storage tents mixed with free market stuff and, yeah, so peoples things going missing, over the Christmas period I think was a big one, we don't know whether people were stealing them or whether they were getting misplaced, or given away in the free market, or, yeah. But my thing was always if you're going to leave stuff there, it's kinda like everybody's. It's everybody's place and I don't think you can blame anybody else if stuff's going missing, you kinda gotta take responsibility for your own things, which I know some people disagreed with as well. It was kinda of, yeah, it was kinda of... I think it was the finger pointing at each other that I found the most difficult in terms of things going missing, cause, you know we really couldn't say who it was being taken by, for all we know it could have been taken by police, you know, and it's like, trying to, you know, or anything, it could have been homeless people as well.

Byron: So were there quite a few homeless people at the camp site?

Jo: There seemed to be, yeah, a number of streeties, who, who we realised didn't like being called homeless actually, and that that was kinda derogatory for some of them and they preferred the term streeties. There seemed to be, and some of them were really active and involved in the camp site. Of course some of them came with their own problems as well, like the drug and alcohol issues or mental health issues or issues of poverty and things so, I guess in a sense some of them felt quite displaced or quite out of, disconnected with other parts of society, and came along to Occupy in kinda trying to create community there as well, that we all were. But yeah it was hard to, we had safer spaces kind of, a kaupapa I guess of safer spaces and guidelines of what was meant to be adhered to, that we found a lot of the time that was just being really disrespected or people didn't even know about that, and so they'd come along and drink during the day, and then other people were worried about the 'look' of Occupy, and what it looked like to the public that people were drinking, I was more concerned with the drinking and behavioural issues around the drinking and the drugs and things there as well. So yeah, tried to stay involved until the end, but did find some of the behaviour quite difficult and quite challenging, particularly aggressiveness, the aggressive behaviour that was there quite often during the day was quite intimidating.

Byron: Why do think it became so difficult to enforce the safer spaces policy?

Jo: I don't think anyone was staying there, who, well, there maybe weren't enough people staying there who, I guess could be there around to, maybe, I don't know about 'police' it but kind of monitor it. So I think we had more people there in the end with, problems, than we had people who were OK if you know what I mean. So all who were involved in Occupy, a lot of the students left over the summer, it started on October 15 and I think by December there was hardly any of the students who originally started it staying there or even being involved in it, and they'd kind of gone off on their summer holidays and things and wanted their tents back and stuff like that, all their things that they'd left there, so that when a lot of the issues around "hey I left this here and its disappeared and where's it gone and who's stolen it? I want to go on holiday" and then they would leave feeling really upset and stuff that things hadn't been looked after for them. And I think by the end, and I'm thinking, what was the month? Was it around March? yeah, it was cooling down and people who had been staying there for a long time or people who had just, there were always some new people getting involved, so by the end of it, in March, most of the people who were there had only been there for a short time, and hadn't been involved from the beginning, so they came along and were kind of like "what's happening here" trying to kind of keep it going, but not really knowing the original consensus and plans around people who were there at the beginning and yeah I mean we had some good people join near the end of the movement, and staying at the camp site. But it was a bit much then and there was so much rubbish, that had just piled up, and wasn't being removed, and there was again the same problem no running water, by this stage we weren't allowed nowhere near the toilets in the hospital cause they had security guards outside them 24/7. They were paying security guards and that was in the public that it was this big issue of Occupy people not using the toilets over there and, you know, the people who were staying at that time really weren't responsible for that stuff because they hadn't been there where those things had originally happened. It would have been much cheaper for them just to actually hire us a porta-loo than to provide round the clock security for the hospital but the idea was that they wanted us gone from the park so I think there was a bit of a campaign by the hospital management, the health

board maybe, to get rid of us, so it was a bit of a campaign against us, that kind of had started right that beginning, saying that it was a very unsafe place, and it probably was unsafe to a certain degree, but it probably had always been unsafe.

Byron: So Occupy Christchurch maintained a camp site longer than the other New Zealand occupations in Auckland and Wellington, Dunedin. What do you think the reason was that Christchurch was able to outlast the others?

Jo: Maybe cause we were in a nice park, could have been, we weren't right in the centre of town, we weren't too much in people's faces, you know the public weren't that sick of us maybe, I don't know, maybe just that there were more homeless people in Christchurch at the time. So there were more people to take over the camp site, near the end I think there was a really strong group of guys staying there, and a few women as well, who were staying there who had been, who were homeless, who were streeties, and if they weren't staying at Occupy they would be squatting somewhere else.

Byron: So there was quite a change in who was there from October to March?

Jo: Yeah

Byron: And sort of a demographic change as well, with students at the beginning and streeties at the end.

Jo: Yeah I guess that was a real shift that way, and I think that seeing the more that it wasn't the nice students and it became kinda the streeties and the people who [weren't], you know, middle class or whatever and, people of colour, and that it became more villainised as well, by the public, in the public eye we were more dangerous and more scary, and I mean there were things happening there that weren't OK, but I think that it, I don't know whether that was so much at the beginning or whether it was more at the end, or whether they were just dealt with at the beginning more. Were you staying there at the beginning?

Byron: Yeah

Jo: And there were a lot more people at the beginning staying there, a lot more people so it kinda of, yeah...

Byron: What did you think of the way that media covered and portrayed Occupy, places like the Christchurch Mail and *The Press*, and *NewsTalk ZB*?

Jo: Yeah, oh I just think it was really, quite sad really, but I just kinda think that's... that's the mainstream media and if that's what they think of, those people, then you know, they're just kinda, quite ignorant, and it wasn't at all helpful. Yeah I was quite disappointed at some of the stuff that was in *The Mail*, even quite from the beginning they didn't really have any grasp on the issues, and even though we were sending out lots of press releases, the things that were in *The Press* releases weren't being picked up by the media, and you know we were giving them lots of information at that time, that they could have used any of that, but they chose to do things like, using the toilets and that kind of stuff was always their angle, and that was right across New Zealand that angle of "oh they're using public toilets!" and "they're cleaning in the bathrooms!", and you know, "it's not

a free camping ground!" and just real ignorance towards the issues, you know, and they're issues that affect so many people, and we're looking at, you know... for me I think it was about inequality, that that's really what we're protesting against, and that increasing in equality and that increasing gap between rich and poor, and the increasing numbers of working poor, and the small number of people who seemed to have it all, you know? Yeah.

Byron: So what impact do you think that Occupy Christchurch had, and the wider Occupy New Zealand, had on those issues in this country?

Jo: I don't know, I'd like to think, maybe, I don't know whether we were really heard or not, did we increase awareness on those issues? Maybe, maybe somewhat, I think its on-going, on-going work that we have to do. I've heard it said that it's made people start talking about the issues, its brought those issues of inequality, you know, that people can actually start talking about it and how can we bring about change and that kind of thing, and before then it was almost like, the elephant in the room that you didn't talk about, so we kinda brought that to the attention, we're not actually going to ignore this anymore, we're going to start fighting against it, and we're going to work together on that, so yeah, but I think that's an on-going struggle, and Occupy didn't just start that, it was part of something else, but it was maybe, for a lot of people, they started talking about it when before they would prefer to ignore it.

Byron: So that's the sort of, wider societal change, do you think that for people who were involved that being involved in Occupy Christchurch changed them?

Jo: Yeah I think so, I guess so, changed them... I really- for some people it might, because for me it's just part of this long continuum of being involved in anarchist stuff and being an activist and things, it's just, I guess, you know it didn't change me that much, but for other people who hadn't been involved in that before I guess it was, and there was this place we were in the park that was completely accessible so we weren't just connecting with other activists in our own wee little realms, we were connecting with, people walking through the park, a lot. A lot of people who walked through the park, yeah. So I think we would have, it would have in a sense done that and even if the media villianises us and says that we're no good and all that kinda stuff, that it actually, for people who came past and met us and spent time there, and joined in those discussions that were always happening, that yeah it would have brought about some change in their lives, and the people who stayed there and had never been involved in stuff before would have maybe, you know.

Byron: So what were those discussions that were happening at Occupy?

Jo: I guess discussions about injustice and inequality, about how the system becomes so, seems to be just you know, getting worse and worse and at the moment I'm really focused on the welfare stuff, so that punitive stuff that's coming in and that's increasing crime and increasing poverty, so social justice issues, a lot of the discussions around social justice, whether it was social injustice in peoples own lives, and quite often that would be the case, people talking about what's happening in their lives and how they're experienced injustice, and then talking about, what's the bigger picture with that.

Byron: So these discussions were they formally organised as activities or did these just sort of

happen among people who were staying there?

Jo: Yeah I think they were happening just among people who were staying there and people who would stop and have a cup of tea and things, and then we did organise the teach-ins as well, the workshops and things, so there were workshops, there were a few that we had on site near the end, so we were trying to get some kind of reclaiming that space as like an activist space, cause it kind of seemed to be falling apart, so organising things like teach-ins and discussions they seemed to go really well, and we had a lot of people coming along and joining in those. On the last day heaps of people came along for those, and then it was really sad that we were packing up and going, when there seemed to be that energy there again, that we'd lost for a while. But then we were also aware of people camping in the park over the winter, and it was going to be quite tough on them. Near the end as well there was the police were coming around every night and going through peoples things, and a lot of people felt intimidated and that they couldn't stand up against the police and a say "hey, no you're not going through my tent" so police were arriving looking for warrants- looking for people who had warrants for them, going through everybody's tents waking people up in the middle of the night and just generally hassling them, so that was also an issue for the people staying there near the end.

Byron: So where did the movement go after it left Hagley Park?

Jo: It seems to be that we kept meeting, there was a woman's group that kept meeting, we had a picnic last weekend and there was only a few of us, but that might have just been that week, but there's still women still meeting and it seems like it would be nice to see some other people taking initiative, some other people organising get together, we met for quite a while and kept organising together, and then we had one particularly difficult, or a few particularly difficult members of the group who became very dominating and kinda scared off a lot of people, I kinda stopped going to meetings at that point because I was kinda fed up with them, and there was a bit of bullying going on, and they were being abusive online as well to people, so we had kinda dealt with that for a wee while after we left the camp and they ended up getting kicked off the online discussions but we haven't really regrouped since then and people have gone on to do their own projects and things. Though I see, I mean you know, now we're got the potential- next weekend, weekend after, to re-occupy the park and a call out's been done for that, for the anniversary, to re-occupy, so that might happen.

Byron: So you mentioned the online group a couple of times, what was the role of the internet and of social media in Occupy Christchurch?

Jo: Well I think a lot of organising was done online, and it almost seemed like at one stage there was the camp site and then there was the online and they were completely separate groups, because the people that were online weren't staying at the camp site, I remember when we organised the, what was her name?

Byron: Amanda Palmer

Jo: The Amanda Palmer gig, and the people- I arrived early because I thought, I'll arrive early and clean up a bit, cause I knew I'd need to get there and clean up before the Amanda Palmer gig, and I arrived there and nobody at the camp site knew this was happening, but everybody online

knew, and I was like, there is some really poor communication going on if we hadn't managed to get it, and I'm like "I've been down at the camp site, did I not even bother to mention it to them?" you know, in the week before hand I might told someone and they didn't pass that on, or you know or something, but yeah the communication between online and the camp site was like two separate groups and then the organising online sorta continued on it seems to have faded a bit at the moment, whether that's just a natural kinda like, you know, fading out until there is something that seems we need the Occupy group to organise again.

But I wonder whether it's like, the Occupy group- almost if like, if we try and organise as Occupy people are a little bit put off by it, or people who have left Occupy on bad terms, or people who have had a, you know, there's kinda like also all this other stuff attached to the Occupy [name] and is it better just to leave it as it was, and just continue on and people who have, now we've continued with other people as well who are organising and things all want to be involved in that kinda stuff, rather than keep just being Occupy you know? Is that necessary.

Byron: So you talked a bit about the women's group, how did that get started?

Jo: Oh... I'm not sure actually, I think we just decided to, oh we decided to have a women's potluck, I think it was Nic and maybe Nic and Kelly had called the woman's pot luck and we had something run at Karen Austin's house and that was really nice and we thought, well, should we meet regularly. It was really to discuss, because people were- for women to discuss and kinda talk about the safe spaces stuff because a lot of them had felt unsafe in the Occupy, at the camp site, because of the aggressive behaviour and because of the drinking, things like that were happening and there [weren't] many women staying there and when they were they were often being made to feel a bit uncomfortable, or unsafe. There was a `young girl who was staying there who was assaulted, sexually assaulted, in her tent, so that was a real low for the movement. And it wasn't someone who was staying there, but the media kinda picked up on it, and was like, you know, this has happened here. And I think he got away, he didn't get charged for that in the end. So that kinda made everybody feel, and we were kinda hoping that she might get involved in the women's groups, unfortunately she hasn't really and I think she felt quite a lot of resentment toward the Occupy movement after she left, and they started up a bit of a hate page [on Facebook] and things, and was a bit nasty, and kinda made it unsafe for the people that were staying there at the time, by suggesting that people should kinda go and attack them and stuff.

Byron: Were there many problems with hostile members of the public at all?

Jo: I mean we had a lot of calling, people shouting out of cars and things, "get a job!" and you know all that "get out of the park" and that kinda stuff but we kinda learned to manage that after a while. There was the occasional, I mean like, the person who assaulted the young person in her tent, he was from outside of Occupy and at the Amanda Palmer gig there was someone who came along and started ripping down stuff, and there was a bit of brawl happening, while they were singing, which was kinda like, pretty rough, and we had some people with mental health problems and you think they're going to arrive and they're going to stay and then they just kinda become really abusive, I can't think of any other incidents, but there were probably lots.

So I don't know, I think it will be interesting to see who, if we have another get together at Occupy

corner[2] what happens from there, it may be that it resparks the group or it may be that it's just, you know, is a nice day, or it might be that no one comes along and it might be a really good crowd.

Byron: Because there must have been, over the six months at the camp site, there must have been hundreds of people involved

Jo: But I wonder how many of those people are, how do we reach them again? Maybe if we did a press release and managed to get in the newspaper or something people know about it, but I don't know how we reach those people again if they're not online, because I imagine a lot of them weren't online, and it did really connect with a lot of working class people, maybe not so much in the early days but after the first month it seemed to be.

Byron: So what do you think was the appeal of Occupy then, to those people who got involved later on?

Jo: For a lot of them I think... I don't know really, I don't know whether it was that they really felt that they wanted to be involved in Occupy or whether it was an opportunity to find somewhere to stay, probably there were some of them who felt that they were activists as well. Whether it was a free meal or, I had heard that the City Mission was telling people to go to Occupy if they were full, so it became a bit of a tent city, as in "oh the City Mission's full so go see if you can find a tent or a bed at Occupy, and I think its five dollars or something to stay at the city mission, and it was actually free to stay at Occupy.

So yeah I did feel like I'd arrive there and I'd be like a social worker or something, because often I would arrive, I'd try and get there a few times a week, sometimes I'd only go once a week depending on how busy I was but I'd often arrive and people would kinda run up to me and tell me everything that had been happening there over the last few days and want me to start out the problems and I'm going like, "what?" its kinda like oh no, try and talk to people about things that have been happening, and it wasn't that people were able to self-manage in a way, and did they need someone there who was kinda that, manager of it or whatever, you know, I don't really like working like that, so it was kind of... yeah, you'd hear all kinds of stories when you'd arrive and it would be like "oh my god..."

Remember Troy and his dog, he could be a bit of a problem. He'd be someone interesting to talk too actually

Byron: Yeah definitely

Jo: He floats around New Brighton, I've seen him here a few times walking around with his dog and stuff

Byron: I'll have to try and find him

Jo: Yeah he always says hi

Byron: I guess for a lot of people then it would be, it would have meant coming into proximity with a segment of society that they might not usually, whether it's those students from the start coming in contact with streeties or whether it's all those people with experiences of mental illness,

and people who have never known people like that, or even people coming into contact with activists

Jo: Yeah I guess so

Byron: Do you think people learned a lot from Occupy

Jo: Yeah maybe some, maybe, some ways, maybe learning to step into some of those roles, or to consider the idea of safe spaces or to consider how their drinking might affect other people, or to think about how possibly the idea of community or sharing living could work and yeah I guess if they were open to learning about stuff they would have been learning I guess, because I think we always are anyway.

Byron: So you've remained active obviously since Occupy, what are you involved in now?

Jo: At the moment working on some stuff against welfare reforms, what else has been happening lately? Involved in the housing stuff, Christchurch has been dealing with the housing shortage and rent hikes, mostly it's on the street kinda activist stuff

Byron: Do you think that Occupy has influenced the things that have come afterwards, like I noticed with the welfare reforms, the group that started called themselves 'Occupy WINZ'

Jo: Yeah so there was an Occupy WINZ group online and it's been there for a little while, it's actually been there for a we while and I was on that page for a while so I've been following posts, but it was never really like an activist page, it was called Occupy WINZ but it was really a lot of people talking about their problems and problems they were having with WINZ and it was a bit boring actually, and I was kinda like, following the page and I'd read the posts but I wasn't really commenting on them, so it was just a really small kinda group whinging- but that's ok, because you have to whinge because WINZ is shit, and talk about your issues and what's happening for them, so it's interesting that that has now become quite a political page, and a lot of people got involved in it since I said 'This is started by Occupy WINZ' and there was this massive influx of members onto the page and it was quite exciting to see that's it's now being used as a kinda activist organising kind of place.

Yeah so that's interesting hey, that that group even then called themselves Occupy WINZ, and I wasn't on, I don't think I was on the Occupy WINZ page right from when it began, so it may have been that it was more kind of activist in the beginning and then it just kinda had died out and now it's kind of restarted again. I just thought, wow, on that Occupy WINZ page everyone was saying how, and then we started talking about the reforms and I was like, we just really need to do something about this, let's have a national day of action, "OK we'll have a nation day of action!" make a page and then I'm like "what the hell have I done, now I have to organise a national day of action" and it wasn't [big], I was surprised at the small turn out in Christchurch for our actual national day of action, because there [were] only about 20 people and it was a Friday afternoon picket outside Riccarton WINZ but we were actually really effective, it felt like we were just as effective as if we had have been a big march, because we're in such a visible space and it's a busy road and we were right outside WINZ and we felt like we were in the right place and we were able to hand out flyers and people walking in and outside of the WINZ office would stop to talk so we

were able to talk to them about the issues so we felt it was really effective anyway, so we were there for about four hours, we arrived at twelve and left about four o'clock but the whole time there was just so much energy. And we didn't see any of the, oh one of the WINZ workers, a security guard came out, a young guy came and I gave him the flyers and said this is what we're here about and you'll know it says we're not here to disturb your work and we're not going to be Occupying the building we're just going to be outside, and he was cool, really nice, the police were there and just kinda stood off to the side, and were quite friendly when they did talk to us and, you know, expressed that we had a right to be there, and a right to protest what was happening, so they were quite supportive as well, and the people going past in the cars were tooting as well, so I think it was, it felt quite good, and it kinda made me realise small actions in a good place, can be just as effective as larger marches. We weren't getting in anyone's way and we were enjoying what we were doing and sharing information and stuff so it felt really good. So we're going to be doing that again this Friday, outside WINZ, same place. Do you have to work on Fridays?

Byron: Yeah

Jo: Unfortunately. See I was really keen to do a Saturday march, but the other centres were kinda really exhausted because they did marches already, it doesn't mean that we couldn't but it kinda of, yeah. It doesn't seem to... I think the fact that it was coordinated nationally did actually give it more impact, because we got a lot of news coverage and radio coverage all from over the country. It didn't feel like, if there was just a march in Christchurch it wouldn't really have as much impact

Byron: So as well as being in a park rather than in a public square, do you think that being in Christchurch, not long after the major earthquakes and the aftermath of that, do you think that changes how- or changed the nature of Occupy Christchurch?

Jo: Yeah, it might have too, I guess people were feeling more community minded at that time, and we all had something in common to talk about at that time, you know when someone arrives there's a, you know "oh so what happened to you? it's that kind of discussion that happens that kind of opens up for more discussion, because we were all sharing our stories about that hey, it's also kind of like, we just watched 'The Shock Doctrine' last night and I was watching that and thinking- have you seen it?

Byron: I've read the book I haven't seen the movie

Jo: Oh the movie's really worth watching, really worth watching the movie. Yeah because I hadn't watched it and it was quite shocking, the whole process of, what the kind of, looking at New Orleans and you can see, oh that's exactly the same thing that they did in Christchurch, just after the September Earthquake was when they announced national standards, and that's when they could kinda push that through when people were really distracted by the earthquake and other things, now you know they're pushing through the, oh what is it the schools things?

Byron: Charter schools

Jo: Charter schools, and let's try them on Christchurch first, you know? And lying about a whole lot of information to make it seem like a really good idea. So yeah, I think the National government are taking advantage of fact that we've been through a national disaster and that the

focus is on that and [they] can really you know, leverage that to push through some awful stuff, and I wonder if part of the welfare stuff is about that as well, and you know the Fletchers making so much money and holding so much of the work back from being done because they want only their contractors to get the contracts and to be making all the money out of that. That kind of stuff as well, that disaster capitalism, privatise education and all that kind of nasty stuff.

And it also connects to the welfare stuff, included in that shock doctrine is one of the other things that they do is, removing welfare.

Byron: So what do you think would be your best memory from Occupy?

Jo: My best memory? probably doing things like making the banners, or making the little badges, and sometimes playing music, yeah, that kind of stuff [Laughs] hanging out, I liked all the young people at Occupy too I thought they were really good. You know, I didn't really get the idea of why it kinda seemed like, there was a lot of like, anti- them just being there because they were hanging out and they weren't "contributing" you know that kind of stuff, but I think they did contribute in their own ways, and they had a lot of energy, and really social you know? Although then I wasn't staying there at nights and I know they could be quite rowdy in the evenings and some people found that hard to camp with them.

Byron: Do you think anything like that, like Occupy Christchurch, would ever happen here again?

Jo: Oh I hope so, I would think so hey, though I hope that we don't end up all having to live in tents, and having tent cities because there is no social welfare and people have no choice but to all be homeless and live like that, because it is really a tough lifestyle, and I don't know if I'm, for myself I just think, I can imagine if people had to live long term in those kind of conditions it would be really hard on your health and your wellbeing. I think as a protest it's a really... I like the idea they just 'occupied', and you know I think that's a really good, you know we don't just have to strike, we can Occupy, and you know when we were outside the thing on Friday, outside WINZ for the welfare reforms, just sitting there going "yeah let's just Occupy WINZ, let's just stay sitting here" you know and it's just this idea that, you know we can just keep pushing and if they're going to push us we can push back, and that's another tactic we can use, you know, is to actually occupy spaces, not be invisible, you know. Yeah because we were sitting there going, actually this got a really good shelter here, some cardboard boxes it's a really good protest statement you know, people outside the WINZ office. So that idea of creative process, I think, and creative protests, is worth looking more at you know, and we've been yeah, there's so many creative ideas that people have come up with recently. And so it makes that acceptable, to occupy, to challenge authority and to say actually, this is what we're going to do, and we don't need your permission to do it and these are the reasons why, and being strong in that struggle, yeah.

Byron: Some of what I've read, both sort of from locally and overseas, is that the Occupy movement made protest something that people do again; it's brought it back as a way of effecting change

Jo: Yeah there was something in that Shock Doctrine [film] about that she was saying, how many pickets and how many strikes were there in nineteen thirty- I don't know what year it was, nineteen thirty-something, and she said that year there were, sorry my thing for numbers is really

bad, but that year there were like five hundred and something strikes, how many strikes were there in 2005? Twenty. You know, it's like we're lost that striking is completely acceptable, if there's something you don't like, strike, if there's some condition you want met, and it doesn't matter how people are there, it's that you can keep pushing back at them when they push you. Because that's the only way we'll ever move forward, and whether it's a strike or whether it's an occupy or whether it's some sort of other kind of, creative protest, like, you know, the smashing of the WINZ windows with the hammer, you know I think that's awesome- that guy has got so much publicity for that and so much support, and now he's like a hero, and he could have just gone home nobody would have known that here he was this person who had been declined a WINZ food grant, and he's disabled and he's come miles to get to that WINZ office to ask for a food grant, they told him to go home and get more information, he went home, got more information, came back again in his wheelchair, [arrives at] the WINZ office, they said "oh sorry we've already given you three, and we'll have to put you through a budgeting course, but we won't be able to do that for two weeks because that's the next appointment" and he could have just gone home and said "OK I'll have that appointment in two weeks and I'll starve for two weeks" but he didn't, he said this isn't fair, he got a hammer he smashed the windows, to me that's like, yes!

Byron: Direct action

Jo: and we need more of that. "If I had a hammer" I'd smash WINZ, I'd smash the system
[Laughs]

It's made it acceptable, it's made it OK, and it's made it something that's fun and creative.

Natalie Hughes

Recorded Twenty-seventh October 2012

Byron: OK I'm going to start by asking you, how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Natalie: I was attending Hagley Community College at the time, in [2011], and I was taking some art subjects to fill in my time and sort of up skill, because I'm a bit of an artist, and I noticed the tents went up so I just approached one day and asked if there was anything I could do to help, and looked up online and then thought I should get involved.

Byron: So what inspired you to get involved?

Natalie: Mainly the political aspect with the whole anti-government corruption aspect and sort of the idea of, equality and socio-economic justice and stuff like that really inspired me.

Byron: So what sort of response did you get when you came and approached and asked if there was anything you could do?

Natalie: Very positive.

Byron: Very positive? So what sort of things were you doing to help out with Occupy?

Natalie: Putting up signs really, not a lot, I did some dishes, to begin with, and then once I got fully involved and I understood more about the principles and the sort of mission statement stuff like that, I took it upon myself to explain to passers-by who wanted to know as well, to give a bit more knowledge.

Byron: So did you attend the general assemblies?

Natalie: Yes

Byron: And what was a general assembly like? How did that work?

Natalie: I did join at quite a late stage so I think the general assemblies were still quite formal though because I was there on day 89 I think was my first day, so it had a bit of a structure, you had an agenda and you'd go through all the points on the agenda and then there'd be room at the end for general discussion, but as time went on the agenda became the focus rather than the general discussion at the end, and so it sort of got even more formal, and then after a while it got less and less formal and there was more general discussion, so a bit of an evolution over time.

Byron: So with all this general discussion what sort of things were being discussed?

Natalie: A lot of different people's opinions and worldviews were only discussed which was something I'd never come across before, because everyone was very accepting and after a while it was sort of to do with maintenance of the camp and stuff, less so with the political aspects, but once the camp stage was over and we all got moved on by the Council a lot of the political and worldview stuff started to come back again, and "where too from here" and stuff like that.

Byron: So what sort of worldviews were you exposed to by these general discussions?

Natalie: A very, wide range.

Byron: A very wide range, so Occupy wasn't a sort of homogenous kind of view; it was a mixture of a whole lot of different world views?

Natalie: Yeah, with the same purpose.

Byron: What were some of the activities you participated in during your time at Occupy?

Natalie: Open Air University, was a good one.

Byron: And what was the Open Air University?

Natalie: A chance for people to come and educate anyone who was in that area on different subjects and stuff, people who had qualifications in that area, or people who just knew a lot about the subject and wanted to get the word out about it, I think the one time I talked about something was right at the end of the camp stage, and I talked about Globalisation.

Byron: And were these quite well attended, these Open Air Universities?

Natalie: I think so, and not just by people from Occupy.

Byron: So that was a- brought in more people than were staying at the camp site and were involved in the day-to-day?

Natalie: Yeah.

Byron: Was there much in the way of protest action at the time when you were involved?

Natalie: At the time when I was involved yes I think so. There was a protest outside Gerry Brownlee's office to do with housing after the earthquake, and I had a lot of invitations to go to different protests, but I never really attended since then, stuff like welfare reforms I think was one of them, which I didn't go to, not that I didn't agree with it, but yeah.

Byron: So you stayed involved after the camp site ended in Hagley Park, how did the movement change after the campsite packed up and left?

Natalie: It was almost like a filter, in that it left the movement with a lot of the people who were most dedicated, therefore the discussions were more focused I think.

Byron: So it was a positive move to end the camp site do you think?

Natalie: I think so.

Byron: What are some of your best memories from your time being involved in Occupy?

Natalie: To be honest the last day of camp, because it brought everybody together and everybody was smiling even though the camp was over, and *The Press* were there and there was a lot of interviews and things but it was just a really nice feeling to have been involved in such a global movement so I was really stoked that day, that I stuck it through to the end, and I also met my partner at Occupy, and that's awesome [Laughs].

Byron: So with it being a global movement did you feel connected to people in Zucotti Park in

New York and London and all these other cities, you feel there was a connection between Occupy Christchurch and the other Occupies around the world?

Natalie: Yes I think so, and I joined some mailing lists from Occupy New York as well, so I got a lot of information from them, and I remember seeing a big cardboard poster of a world map and lots of pins where all the different Occupy places were and I just thought "wow, that's huge and I'm a part of it" it's a really good feeling.

Byron: And you met your partner at Occupy, how did that happen?

Natalie: He was actually the first person I talked to when I entered the camp site, and he was just so happy to see someone who wanted to help, because I think he often did a lot of the cleaning himself at that stage, but yeah, and then we got talking after that, and I moved into his tent.

Byron: So had you had any involvement in any kind of political activism before Occupy or was this a totally new experience?

Natalie: I think it was a totally new experience, yeah.

Byron: Do you think that Occupy Christchurch achieved anything? Did it change anything in Christchurch or in New Zealand?

Natalie: I think it changed a lot of people's lives, because people met and lived with other people who were like minded and its built a lot of really good relationships from there, and a huge network of people who are politically active, is a really good thing for protest in the future I think because everyone sends each other messages about the next thing that's happening and they still have discussions and everything, I think it's a good thing in that respect.

Byron: Do you think that it brought together a lot of people who, in other contexts probably wouldn't be associating with each other?

Natalie: Yes.

Byron: In what ways?

Natalie: People from all sorts of different socio-economic backgrounds were grouped together, so you've got very wealthy and established people and people who had no fixed abode living together, and I think that was great for both parties because those people who were previously on the street had a really safe place, a sort of family environment, community that they belonged to, and I think that was really amazing to see, and everyone brought their different ideas and world views and there were people who [were into] conspiracy theories for example, but they were still accepted into the mix, but with that I think there was a negative aspect because the amount of acceptance there was amazing, but it sort of skewed the focus on what Occupy was about at times.

Byron: In what ways?

Natalie: It just caused a lot of arguments and also people were bringing their own spin on it so to speak, and try to spread it that among people who didn't know what Occupy was about, so they'd be lots of different people with a different understanding of what Occupy was, in terms of PR type stuff.

Byron: So, kinda conflicting ideas about what Occupy was were being spread, wider than Occupy?

Natalie: I think so.

Byron: Do you think that that altered the public perception of Occupy at all?

Natalie: I actually don't know?

Byron: How did you find the public perception of Occupy Christchurch? Did you find it was positive, negative, a mix?

Natalie: A mix, leaning more toward negative, mainly because of the media coverage, they had quite a negative angle on it, but a lot of people that I talked to in my social circles thought it was a great thing, my parents were very supportive, so yeah, a mixture I guess.

Byron: Could you elaborate on your thoughts on the media coverage of Occupy, what did you think of the coverage that it got in *The Press* and *The Mail* and elsewhere?

Natalie: I saw a difference between the two major news companies, in their portrayal of the fact that Occupy was closing down at the end, one of them focused on the fact that it had been a valid protest movement, and the other one was like "oh thank goodness they're going finally from the park" you know the public place that had been occupied, and if it goes any further we're going to do this and this and all this terrible stuff, so they were both covering both sides, the positive and the negative side of public opinion but one of them was leaning heavily on the negative.

Byron: So was this the TV networks?

Natalie: Yeah the TV networks.

Byron: Do you think that being young and being female made your experience of Occupy different than it would be for some of the people involved?

Natalie: I think so, there was a lot of talk about, toward the end of the occupation, that it didn't feel to safe to be a woman or child, not that I'm a child, but women with their children didn't tend to arrive as much, and I think was, I was the last female to be full-time living at the camp, but I think the reason why I felt safe was because of the company that I kept. I had quite good friends who would look after me, in the camp. Whereas if I didn't know any of those people I probably wouldn't have stayed as long.

Byron: And there was a woman's group that formed out of Occupy, you were involved in that?

Natalie: Yes, still am.

Byron: So how were you involved in that when it began?

Natalie: I supported the idea when it first came up, I think at one of the GAs before they stopped, and I remember I think there was one meeting but there wasn't another meeting for quite a long time and I really wanted to get to know the women more and talk about issues relating to women and stuff like that, so I think I strongly suggested that we get organised, and make a time, so I think the second meeting at a cafe in Christchurch was very much influenced by me [Laughs] so yeah I think it's a great thing.

Byron: And so what was the Occupy women's group doing?

Natalie: It was more of a social get together, but it was, again a chance to share political ideas and for some a way to, sort of get away from certain members who tended to have quite a lot of control in the GAs and there wasn't much... I think there was a lot of conflict at the time, so it was a way to get away from certain people who just happened to be male, it's not that they're male, they're just the people they are, caused quite a lot of conflict between the men and the women, so it's a way to have a peaceful discussion, is another aspect of it.

Byron: So the discussions going on at the Occupy women's group were similar to the general discussions that had been going on at Occupy early on?

Natalie: Yes.

Byron: Are you still in touch with many people from Occupy still?

Natalie: Yep whenever I see anyone who was involved I go and say hi and start a conversation with them.

Byron: So in what ways has being involved in Occupy changed your life?

Natalie: I think it's really broadened my perspective on community and the humanity of people from all different backgrounds and how there are a lot of similarities, in people striving for justice and equity and stuff like that, no matter how they've been brought up, and it just takes that mind-set to really try to make a difference and strive for something really good. So that's inspired me to be a lot more politically active as well, and yeah its formed friendships for life I think.

Byron: So what ways are you politically active now, post-Occupy?

Natalie: I like to share by opinion a lot, bolder than I had before, and research I think is a major thing that I do a lot more now, so I can back up my opinions because they are constantly challenged at Occupy and it's important to really know what you're saying, whereas the teenage me would have just gone "I think this, therefore this".

I plan to attend more protests, that fit with my own values, not for the sake of protesting, but for the sake of getting ideas across that I believe and also in my field that I'm about to into for my career, which is mental health, I want to work on service development and a lot of policy issues that are in that area of things. So yeah, I think that comes from Occupy.

Byron: So at Occupy where there was this mixing of different of different world views and things you were finding your own views were being challenged at Occupy?

Natalie: I think so, and in my social sphere.

Byron: In your social sphere outside of Occupy your views were being challenged as well?

Natalie: Yes.

Byron: And you felt that that was a positive thing people its led to you doing that research to be able to back your views?

Natalie: Yeah.

Byron: So what sort of research are you doing?

Natalie: I'm looking more into adequate sourcing, so looking for actual scientific studies and things, and sometimes really stunning things to do with people you can't be totally accurate but the more people you have in a survey the better your results will be, the more accurate the results, so stuff like that.

Byron: If something like Occupy were to happen again, in that same sort of form, of a large public on-going protest, do you think you'd get involved again?

Natalie: I'm not sure actually, I might not, because Occupy was what it was, it was amazing and it was the first time I'd ever done something like that, so it really changed who I am now, but there was a lot of... it's very hard to work to be in that sort of environment, so I think I would prefer to put my efforts into other areas. But I'd love to encourage people to be a part of that in the future.

Byron: So what made it hard work?

Natalie: The camp lifestyle, having to deal with people every day, it was so diverse and a bit out of your comfort zone at times, constant backlash from, my school, Hagley College, because they'd hired security guards, I'm not sure whether it was for the purpose of keeping the students away from the camp or keeping the camp away from the students, and Hagley Students opinion of Occupy was very negative, so that's a different peer group I was having a clash with.

Byron: Why do you think their opinions were negative?

Natalie: I think young people today, in my experience, tend to really pay attention to media and social media, and the popular sort of opinions of things without really doing the hard work and effort of checking sources and backing up things with facts. But that's not necessarily everybody, I just think, yeah.

Byron: So is there anything else you'd want to say about, about Occupy?

Natalie: I think reiterating what I said before, about how it's changed so many people's lives, it's been a real force for good I think, in Christchurch and that if this were to happen again I think people seriously consider getting involved because it's such an amazing experience and you learn a lot and its life changing, so yeah.

Byron: So do you feel that while it may not have changed much in the short term, but while its changed so many people's lives do you think that will go on to lead to, in the long term some societal change?

Natalie: I think so, especially because there were quite a lot of young people involved, and it's sort of, planting the seed really, to use a really corny metaphor, for change, I think, and people really have quite a strong voice now who've been involved, not outspoken but yeah.

Julian Hapurona

Recorded Twenty-seventh October 2012

Byron: So the first question I'll ask is, how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Julian: Actually thanks to Jo, a friend Joe Rau I think his name is, he was involved with Occupy Christchurch kind of near the beginning, used to pop around my house and always tell me "Come on down, occupy!", told me what they're all about, just come down see if you like it. One day I thought, I'm walking past it anyway I might as well stop and see how things are, and yeah, kinda went from there.

Byron: So this is quite early on in Occupy?

Julian: I think somewhere round November?

Byron: So what happened when you first popped on by that inspired you to get involved and stay involved?

Julian: It was actually during one of their meetings, and I just felt like, Joe was trying to like "oh these meetings go round and round" but I want to see what it's like, and actually kind of liked hearing all the different opinions and what people thought of the state of, well, the country and the government and just all the different ideas on what could possibly be done, it just kinda really inspired me that we could do something to make a change in the world.

Byron: So this was one of the general assemblies?

Julian: Yeah

Byron: So what sort of things were talked about at the general assemblies?

Julian: The first one I went too, what were they talking about... I know the tents got mentioned, I don't think it was the housing issue then, I think that popped up about a month or two later, I think the first one was on, the first meeting was on solidarity with, possibly Auckland or Dunedin.

Byron: So with Auckland or Dunedin; so there was quite a link between Occupy Christchurch and the other Occupy camps around New Zealand?

Julian: Yeah

Byron: And when you got involved were you, you were camping at the site?

Julian: At first I still had my house that I was staying at in Sydenham but I did stay there almost on a daily basis after that, yeah just camping with a couple of mates on the site.

Byron: You moved out of your house to camp fulltime?

Julian: Yes.

Byron: That must have been a big decision to make, or was it not?

Julian: It was actually, it took about a week and a half, two weeks of just sitting there humming and haring, thinking oh there could be all these benefits and it's like, oh but I won't have my

house anymore, but then I'll be able to spend full time down at the site I'll be able to put all money into the site and won't have to worry about any of that sort of stuff.

Byron: And you obviously decided that was the best way to go then?

Julian: Yeah.

Byron: What was it that made you want to give so much to the movement, so much of your time and the extra money you had from not renting a flat?

Julian: I guess it's just, I don't know the whole thing, everything about it inspired me, everyone kinda giving up their time and their money just to try and help virtually everyone they don't even know, like all these people no one really, they don't know but they do know are suffering you know we see people suffering all over the city and yet these people are giving up their time and money, just everything they have, just to try and help people, to make sure everything's fair for everyone rather than just you know, the rich elite or the government benefiting from everything and it was just, kind of because, I don't know, most of my life I've kinda lived in poverty and lived on the street and what not, and just to see so many people give up everything they had for people like me, was, extremely inspiring, like I just couldn't fathom it, I never actually, never really thought anyone would be willing to do those sorts of things, until I kinda went to Occupy.

Byron: So it wasn't your first experience of being with no fixed abode?

Julian: Nah [Laughs].

Byron: Do you think you would have been so willing to leave your house if you hadn't experienced that before?

Julian: I don't think so honestly.

Byron: Do you know if anyone did? Anyone who hadn't been homeless did choose to leave their home to camp there?

Julian: Kind of Natalie, kind of, but she was still kind of stuck with her parents, because she was staying with her parents she didn't really give up her home, I know Chef was thinking about it but I, I'm pretty sure he did but I'm not sure if was, had never been homeless before.

Byron: So was this your first, the first sort of involvement in political activism you'd had?

Julian: Yes

Byron: Did you find that the, the world views you were exposed to at Occupy, did they match your own or did they influence your own?

Julian: I think everyone had a bit of a different, a very vast and different world view, but it seemed to come together a lot at Occupy, like, as different as they were they could all influence each other and the end goal always seemed to be the same, no matter how different the view was.

Byron: So with you staying there full time, what would be a typical day at the Occupy camp site?

Julian: When I first went there usually 1) cleaning, that was always a big thing, especially for me because I'm quite a bit of a clean freak and any mess annoys me, so I just end up going on a big cleaning crusade. But depending on the day, sometimes we'd go on protests, we'd go just stop random people on the street and talk to them about it and one thing that was really important to me was just kinda starting the discussion with, just a discussion on that particular political topic with passers-by just to kind of get it into their minds, so that even if they don't agree with us, the topics there, its talked about, its known about.

Another thing like, the, what do we call it? the GK- General Kōrero, which was possibly to me one of the most important things because it gave us a chance to exchange ideas and kinda of, weed out the bad ideas if you know what I mean, like to try and sift through all your ideas to see what could possibly work, what we should do what we shouldn't do, and kinda what's going on in the world.

Byron: So what sort of things were discussed at the General Kōrero?

Julian: A lot about Wall Street and America and kind of the, what the original Occupy movement were doing and a lot about what the Mayor, Bob Parker, what he was doing with the city and Gerry Brownlee and sort of things we could do to kinda fix that, or any protests we could do to kinda bring attention to it.

Byron: So it was a mix of global and local issues that were being discussed?

Julian: Yeah.

Byron: And what were some of these, some of the protests that happened? What were they regarding?

Julian: I think one of the biggest ones, which wasn't kinda run by Occupy but Occupy was a big kinda partner in that, not only due to, not only with the kind of advertising of the protest as well, because the protest, the people who organised the protest came down and gave us all these flyers and all this information and got us to kinda hand them out to everybody but I think was possibly one of the biggest I was involved with, if not the biggest I was involved with at Occupy was the Brownlee protest, that was one possibly one of my favourites, there was another one protesting the Food Bill, although there [weren't] too many people at Occupy at that particular time, tend to be kinda fluctuations in how many people were there and whatnot, so that one was, one of the smaller ones, probably I think it was easily the smallest one. There was only about five of us taking part in it, but the way we saw it wasn't the amount of people taking part, it was the amount of people paying attention.

Byron: So with the Gerry Brownlee protest, why were people protesting Gerry Brownlee specifically?

Julian: [Laughs] there are a few words I'd like to say but I won't, I think the biggest thing is, his kind of way of dealing with the housing crisis in Christchurch, especially the fact that he has repeatedly refused to admit that there is any crisis at all, the fact that he's lucky enough to live happily in his wonderful home, [of] which he has many, while other people suffer and get still able to sit there and pass off everything as if "oh yeah perfectly fine no one's really gonna, there's not much to worry about" that and the fact that, things were not being done the way they should

have been, things were not, I mean, I guess nothing can be perfect but that's no excuse for not doing all you [can] and not putting all your resources, or as much resources as you can into kinda, fixing the problems that are there.

Byron: Do you think that being in this earthquake aftermath with the housing crisis and so on made Occupy Christchurch quite different other Occupy sites around the country and perhaps overseas?

Julian: Yes in many ways, I mean one was that people tended to be more tolerant and more kind of wanting to listen and hear what we had to say, whereas in other places, especially kinda places in Dunedin where they were kinda surrounded by pubs and they'd get waves of drunks coming though causing problems just for the sake of causing problems, and in Auckland where they had a lot of, bad reception with police, and I think one of the biggest things was in Auckland the police didn't seem to care too much whereas a lot of the police really liked what we were doing at Occupy Christchurch and supported us and, were more than happy to kind of hear our side of things, and often help us out and even sometimes they'd just come down to get us to help out with investigations [that are] on going and seeking missing persons and all sorts, I mean I think the biggest thing is after earthquakes and everything people seem to be a lot more tolerant of kinda everyone, of every kinda level, whether it be rich or poor or you know, they seem to have a lot more understanding of... closer knit than most.

Byron: So what are some of your best memories from Occupy Christchurch?

Julian: I had of fun times, I think my best by far was kind of the meeting of Natalie, and kinda with her, just kinda got to know her but apart from that, she, kinda made everything more interesting for me, when things started to go array she'd kinda help me though it a lot more to make it easier on me and even when times weren't that interesting she'd still make it more fun for me. When I first went there they were, that was really another one of my favourite times because there were so many different people there from so many different countries and all over Christchurch and all over New Zealand that, you know it's amazing to have all these different nationalities all sitting there in this big group talking about the different things that are going on in their governments, and with our government and all things we should and could do to kinda help all over the world, like its, I've had a lot of meetings with and friendships with foreigners but never have I been able to have so many foreigners and so many locals all take part in something like that all together as if you know, we'd known each other for all our lives, they'd come down and they were treated like family as soon as they got there, it was absolutely by far one of the best times I've had in my life.

Byron: So there were a number of people there from overseas who became part of the movement here?

Julian: Yeah.

Byron: And were they people who had been involved in Occupy in their countries?

Julian: Some of them yeah, some of them had never even heard of it and happened to hear about it, come down and take part, and were promising to take it back to their country and take part in

their country, and some of them had been long time activists and protesters, and some like TC were travelling from different Occupy points, like she was a part of, one of the many Occupies in America, and had been travelling around to different Occupies in America and came over to New Zealand and was going between the different Occupies, and there were so who'd kinda, like, from Australia came from the Australia Melbourne Occupy straight over to our Occupy and up to Auckland and were travelling overseas to all the different Occupy points, like there was a real kinda sense of solidarity between the whole, it was a worldwide thing it really was.

Byron: And you really felt part of that global movement?

Julian: Yeah.

Byron: Do you think that Occupy changed anything in Christchurch or in New Zealand?

Julian: Personally yeah I think it did, it really like, the thing I think it has changed more importantly is people's views on things, like even if we've only reached out to one or two it's still a big thing, because you've change the view of two people but at least if anything the one thing we really, really did do was get the whole country talking about, get the whole country there talking about these issues, get the whole country focused on the fact that these issues are there, they're prevalent and they're not going away unless we actually do something to fix them. That's why I think personally there's been so many little offshoots of like, all the protests, like the housing protests and the groups popping up to try and help all the homeless.

Byron: So in what ways has it changed you?

Julian: It's made me less cynical [Laughs]. I think in just about every aspect of my life has changed because of Occupy, my outlook on life... I kind of always saw, throughout my life as I've said I've mostly lived in poverty and when I haven't lived in poverty I've lived in a relatively lower income family, I'd always kinda resented the rich as I'd always seen like, I don't know I guess you could say I was a bit, I don't like saying conspiracy theorist but conspiracy theorist-esque style as in, "most of the problems of the world are caused by the rich and the government and they'll all using their money just for the purpose of..." but I think it's changed by outlook as in, its more that, it's not they're every rich person is intentionally trying to drive us down, its more that there are some people out there who are using their money to further their own gain at the expense of everybody else. I seem to be a lot more tolerant of, peoples wealth and peoples actions, and a lot more understanding as to why people do things, like, I don't know, one big thing for me was like, stories but, rich people using their money to push their own agendas, which for some reason always have a really bad habit of hurting poor people, but I can kind of see both sides of the coin a little bit better now, as in, you know I was always on just the one sided, you know "they're all a bunch of pricks" but these days I can kinda see both sides a little better, which is better than just being so staunch in your view that nothing's every going to change it. But yeah I guess most of all its just kinda being able to emphasise with a lot of different people and kinda being more caring about people especially those less fortunate.

Byron: Do you think if something like Occupy were to happen again, that, something like that big on-going public protest, do you think you'd get involved again?

Julian: It would depend on what it was about honestly, if it were like, for the kind of old Occupy style, at least protest of the super-rich using their money to hurt the poor, or the government corruption and corporate corruption I'd happily take part, but I think there would have to be, it would have to be vastly different to what it was to be successful, because I mean, we've had that, and, I don't know, you've kinda gotta change things up to get people talking about it.

Byron: What do you think would need to be different for it to be successful?

Julian: For one I think we'd need a better location, preferably not across the road from the hospital, two I think we'd need a little more... participation from people, because a lot of people were, although in love with the movement, they loved what it was about they were very much for what it was about, but a lot of people weren't able to give their all to it due to prior commitments and whatnot and that's understandable, but a lot of people who did end up giving as much as they can ended up kind of leaving rather early on due to whatever problems or disagreements they had and that kinda, a bit of its downfall, due to the fact that, to many people splitting off into their own directions and people giving up on, especially when a lot of the less fortunate came to join and kinda giving up on them and leaving out of anger or spite or fear or a lot of other things, it really did, kinda does need to, have a lot more commitment kinda from everybody to be more successful.

Byron: Is there anything else you'd like to say about Occupy Christchurch?

Julian: It was absolutely awesome [Laughs]. It changed my life, changed I mean about a lot of things, I mean I wouldn't have met Natalie without it, and I've made all sorts of friends all over the world from all nationalities because of it, it's changed my outlook on life its changed kinda everything who I am and what I find important in my life, its, I absolutely love I'd never take that back in my life, no matter how many chances I had I'd, never take it back, I'd do it exactly the way it was.

Grant McDonagh

Recorded First November 2012

Byron: The first thing I'll ask is, how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Grant: It was actually a slightly complicated process in as much as I saw that it was happening and I heard about it and I sort of participated in a very minimal way. Within about a week of it starting I actually- there was a storm the first week or the second week or something, and I sort of wanted to contribute to I actually gathered together thirteen hoodies and carted them off and gave them to them and they just sort of said 'all right' people just took them as time went by.

And I was contributing what just, food that I had, surplus food I had in the garden, stuff like that. I supported it but there were like individuals involved at the start that I really didn't want to be involved with because of past experiences, but then by about the time it got to about a third of the way in, a lot of those people had dropped out for one reason or another, so I started attending general assemblies, just as time went by I got more and more involved, and about a third of the way before it ended, a bit of a skirmish on Facebook e-list and I just felt it wasn't possible to carry on, I was still interested but I could see it wasn't really fitting in with me, my world view and my politics from that point on. But there were high points, for me the real high point was the Open Air University I'd say.

Byron: So what was it that made you want to contribute at the start when you were bringing along hoodies and food for people, what was it that made you think you wanted to give something to that?

Grant: Well it was really the fact that I'd been a very very long standing participant in left-wing causes and politics, I was the editor of the first ever anarchist magazine, first in New Zealand, in 1975, and had been a long-time supporter of situationist politics, so in both cases anti-authoritarian forms of politics, and I've spend quite a few years working with, particularly anarchists in Christchurch. And I've done a number of jobs, that have sort of been, social work stroke left-wing kind of themed jobs, I was community arts worker for the WEA for a number of years, and I did an oral history project for Te Whare Roimata before I became a capitalist and opened my second hand book shop. Does that answer that?

Byron: So do you think you experienced it quite differently as someone who had all that background in left-wing politics compared to a lot of the people there, for them this was something totally new?

Grant: Oh absolutely, it might have meant in some sense that I had less to contribute, to, sort of you know, to Occupy as it initially happened, coming out of Adbusters, which I didn't even know that really until afterwards, you know I'd read some of the documents that were put onto the Occupy Wall Street website and stuff like that.

I guess I was coming from, like I say from a sort of anti-authoritarian, specifically these days post-Marxist point of view. I always, I think sort of point of difference between me and other, in inverted commas, 'anarchists' has been the fact that I've been much more interested in sort of, deep theory, reading Marx and actually reading bloody, even anarchist people actually reading

Kropotkin and reading Bakunin back in the day, whereas most of those people tend to get the, very kinda over simplified comic strip versions of those things and think it's good enough. There was actually a history of anarchism in New Zealand published about five years ago.

Byron: Oh Tony Boraman's?

Grant: Toby, and I interviewed him for one of my magazines at the time, well it wasn't an interview like a conversation, just an exchange, and he actually said, he said the thing with the current crop of anarchists in New Zealand, the whole philosophy can be summed up as "anarchy is true capitalism sucks" and that's supposedly enough, that's how deep it goes with them, but it's never been like that with me, I was reading bloody Guy and DeBord and Marx and Lukacs and all these people when I was in my twenties you know, and I've never stopped, staying up with what I consider to be the cutting edge of radical theory, to the degree that I've even actually in the last week received things from London and catching up on those, and I'm now 230 pages into Grundrisse.

Byron: wow, impressive.

Grant: [Laughs] yes it's ahh, not really kind of sort of taking it all in, it's one of those things I'll have to re-read a couple of three times to figure it out, but it's fascinating eh, absolutely fascinating I'm finding. Have you read that?

Byron: No, no I haven't, I've just read the first volume of Capital.

Grant: Well, in theory Grundrisse was the blueprint for Capital in some ways but it goes off in different directions and also the people that he's critiquing you know they're quite interesting too, like there was this character called Daramod who spends about forty fifty pages tearing to pieces, and he was actually a follower of Proudhon who was really the person who invented the term anarchism, so it's kinda really a critique of, probably socialism as it was understood in 1820 to 1830, and the thing with Marx too is what's so fascinating, unlike with a lot of other people, is that he gives precise examples with facts and figures to back it up, it's pretty good. There's even actually a chapter about New Zealand, about Edward Gibbon Wakefield in there somewhere, I've seen it in the index but I'll still got another hundred pages or so to get to that one.

Byron: I know he's mentioned in Capital as well, as the architect of these colonial societies in Australia and New Zealand.

Grant: So there's you know, to me there was well there's really, there's the objective revolution, what's going on out there in the world, and there's different ways of describing it, which sometimes come into conflict with each other, and I think a lot of the conflict is to do with the fact that people see it as, kinda of a set of ideas that have to be applicable to the world that's out there, as opposed to being a process, which, you know, it's, that's really the strong thing that Marxism has over anarchism in a way, the process of dialectics is at the centre of it. Took a long time to figure out how to actually use that and understand that, it works, that's the difference [Laughs]

Byron: So did you find the sort of, the attitude at Occupy was similar to maybe the way Toby Boraman described today's anarchists this "capitalism sucks" attitude?

Grant: About three of four different strands of stuff in Occupy eh, I mean there was, can I use names?

Byron: Yeah you can use names.

Grant: There was sort of the Seth mentality of course, which was conspiracy to the max, just totally incoherent dribble really.

Byron: Reptilian world leaders and so on.

Grant: Yeah shape shifters and all that, and as you said a lot of anti-Semitism tied in with it, which is disgusting. And then sort of, Popx' mentality, was, turned out, you know that's pretty superficial too really, because it was sort of, you know "CRAPitalism going down!" but really no substance to his ideas at all, he's got this bloody Rastafarian thing, and I can't really understand why he was even there really, if he thinks like the sort of Christianity- because Rastafarian is really a form of Christianity, but he was so cool anyways, you know just get along and don't talk about that stuff really with him.

The ones who were there at the start, most of them I didn't really ever get to talk to that much in any depth, but you know I probably kinda liked what I saw of most of them, people like Ash and Ryle in particular, I mean Ryle was like the secret bloody hero of the whole thing, for the first probably half it he was sort of like the pillar, the rock it was all based on, but as time went by, the Zeitgeist kinda guys and Zeitgeist mentality, I don't really know what happened with them, I know I was challenging them in a lot of ways. For one reason or another they kinda bugged off and went away which was no great loss.

Rik Tindal was somebody that I actually worked quite closely with, fifteen years or so ago, when I was community arts worker at the WEA, he kinda came in and basically jumped on it with all his sort of weird ideas and stuff. We did what we could, there's actually on the fridge an old poster from May Day 1991 or something. We actually had I think, we organised between the two of us five activities in one day, May Day '91. But his attitude I found to be- well, just and his personality, very authoritarian and very irrational, it kind would come up with, "we're gonna do this" and there was never any kind of basis for it apart from that he decided and wanted to do it. Quite early on there was something happen with him that was, I think it might have even been that very first march, he kind of, it went past some housing rights demonstration or something, and he kinda stopped people and joined in the crowd with this, and then he went to the organiser and said "I want to speak, and have speaking rights" and she refused, you know, it's not your issue and he, just on, it must have been on Facebook or whatever list it was, might have been the Occupy Christchurch page, just went at her in quite a vicious way, and she just stood her ground and said you know, that's what you are you're just a bloody bully, that to me just really summed him up aye, but for whatever reason he was one of the people who kind of stopped, who wasn't there for that middle third, the time that I was involved, and I was quite pleased about that.

But yeah I never really got to know all of those people who were involved right at the very start, like Ash and that, I hardly knew at all, I did quite like when I saw of them, and I can't even remember some but I know there were another half dozen who were involved right at the start who kinda, basically went back to varsity when varsity started up, but then the last third was really the

time where there was probably only, maybe a dozen people, like you and me, and Popx, and Jo or whatever, who were kinda keeping the GA's going, being involved in the GA's, and other things like the university thing, and the rest of people who were there tended to be the street people, homeless street people, and I never really got to know those people that well either, but I really didn't like the fact that people from the first group, you know the university based people, were kinda slagging off the street people at that stage, and that's really where I had the falling out with Joe, over that. Anyway this is getting into personalities here, what else did you wanted to know?

Byron: You mentioned that the highlight for you was the Open Air University, was that I guess because of your interest in radical theory and things, why was that a highlight?

Grant: Well, to me it was, it was really just about the only chance I've ever had really to kind of articulate you know, the ideas that I've been involved with, to a bunch of, eight or nine people or whatever it was who turned up to my talk, and be listened to, and actually be treated with respect to say those things. Because like the history of my involvement with the anarchists, trying to put ideas across to anarchists, has almost always been in written form, in my grubby little Zines over the years. But the response from then has generally been "oh no, too many long words, my head hurts" and that just gets kind of, frustrating after a while, but that bunch of people who came along, or who were there for that particular session, you know that was very, from my point of view, it was a very rewarding thing, I would have liked to have done it again, I had another talk ready to go, it was one on, well based on Moishe Postone's ideas on how racism is component, or feeds into capitalism as a form of valorisation, which had, like I say a talk, another hour session, but I just kinda got shuffled out of the way, or just lost in the whatever so I didn't get to do that, maybe at some point I will in the future.

I'd actually like to see a permanent bloody learning exchange sort of thing, I don't quite know how or if it's ever going to happen, but I mean with sort of the abolition of night classes at pretty much every bloody school that you can think of, seems like an opening for a community based sort of movement, which is what the WEA was originally, back in the 30s and 40s, and between times in the so called 'good times' it became sort of, occupational therapy for retired people.

Byron: So you found a willingness among, at least some of the participants of Occupy to engage with those radical ideas, that theory?

Grant: Well to listen. I don't know how much understanding there was, I mean it's pretty bloody esoteric stuff, the stuff that I'm into now- book I just got this week, from Robert Kirks, Robert Kirks is a writer, this is the first time this particular thing of his has ever been translated into English, this is like esoteric post-Marxist theory from really the 2000s and like, the ways it's very slowly coming to be understood or just being exposed to English speaking people, there's just this very narrow little sort of margin for it to get through, there's probably, you know, in the entire world, there's probably only about 20 or 30 people who are involved in this. But it feels to me as if it's a logical progression from what the situationists were saying and writing in the 60s. Also just this week, about two weeks ago, I published another of my other, my non-political, in theory non-political, zine, my poetry zine, poetry stroke creative writing zine, and I sent a copy of that to this guy Michel in London, and he gave me a severe telling off via email because apparently I need to leave all that stuff behind and concentrate on the politics, which had me fuming, feel like

punching him.

My situation is that, I've had two strokes, one about ten years ago now, and I've actually had, as a result of the second stroke that I had I actually have a part of my brain about the size of a mandarin orange is just like a black hole in the middle of my head, so the fact that I can ever bloody get up and put my clothes on, live a normal life, to me is a pretty major achievement, let alone bloody publishing whatever is, thirty magazines in the last ten years, and it is kinda to me the best use of what's left of my life, to be producing to be thinking these things though, but whatever, he's in a completely situation, he's in London which is way different to Christchurch.

The thing is that there is this bloody huge radical change going on in the world, I think we can use as many different points of view as possible to understand what it is. I mean like, it looked as if bloody Occupy Wall Street in the states had been stomped out of existence, and now with [Hurricane] Sandy apparently there's huge numbers of people, hundreds and hundreds involved in sort of recovery work, basically just come out of the woodwork, and are doing better, considerably better and more work than the official agency FEMA in various places, Rockaway beach and so on. So you know, to me it wasn't quite the same in Christchurch because the anarchists in Christchurch are a very strange bunch. But there was a, I think in Wellington, which is like, sort of the centre of anarchism in New Zealand, there was sort of a, I think sort of had a slightly sort of aloof attitude to Occupy, now we know there were aspects of it which were homophobic and misogynistic but if they weren't prepared to engage, they seemed not to be interested in engaging, like the attitude seemed to be that they were a bunch of bloody drum playing morons, was the feeling that I got from them. The only direct participation I know of is Asher went and spoke about anti-Semitism at one point, his thing got published in various places, did it get published in your magazine?

Byron: It did yes.

Grant: But otherwise they seemed to sort of think well, we've got our analysis and we're just better than them, you know, I sort of thought in a way you know, they aren't all that, they aren't really that cool anyway, the anarchist movements been around in New Zealand for bloody thirty years or something now and there's still only maybe 250 of them in the whole country, and what have they achieved in that time? Despite tiny tiny little things that they've achieved in that time, certainly hasn't achieved anything near what we were hoping to achieve when we first did Anarchy magazine in '75.

I think a lot of these movements people just get into this little echo chamber will small numbers of their friends, they're constantly reinforcing it, they have the same in jokes and the same bloody jargon they just constantly reinforce all the time, and every time, every bloody publication I've put out has been trying to tell them; no, don't, stop talking about yourselves, stop talking between yourselves, there's a bloody world out there you need to engage with. And I think Occupy did quite well, in Christchurch anyway, engaging with the, you know the mainstream society, just by the fact that they were physically there, in that bloody space for 163 days, was it 163 or 164?

Byron: Something like that.

Grant: I actually had it down, I wrote it down at the time, as 165 because the very last two days,

when they kind of weren't officially there, people were still coming and going from the camp and still doing things.

Byron: And we had an Open Air University I think the day after we were, officially left.

Grant: Yeah, and that was the one that Bronwyn Puller, was that her name?

Byron: Bronwyn Haywood.

Grant: Bronwyn Haywood, that's the one she spoke at eh, at the WEA. So that was day 165 yeah. I think we should claim 165 days just on that basis. But you know, apart from the specific circumstances and the specific people just, in principle, I mean it's just bloody awesome the fact that for 165 days there were there in the Park just standing up to Bob Parker and talk back radio and redneck idiots driving past, just being there, you know. I mean the previous kind of, sort of record for people kinda standing up to the powers that be is of course 151 days in 1951, so it went two weeks longer than that, that's pretty cool.

In terms of radical content I suppose there wasn't quite as much, what's your feeling about it? I think it's quite sad in a way, it seems to be almost as if it's just vanished without a trace in Christchurch, in a lot of ways, well I guess it's back where it started from, I mean I've still got probably, eight or nine maybe, people that I've met though Occupy who are now my Facebook friends, and my latest Zine, the poetry one, is two people that I met through Occupy have contributed to that. Small steps I suppose. But it's interesting, it's been interesting to me kinda checking up on things that I kinda knew about anyway, for comparison, like I've got a book of documents on the Paris Commune, looking at sort of the mind-set of people who were involved in that, and there was this real chaotic and contradictory element to that as well, which is very much the same as Occupy, particularly when people like Gastra come in involved with in and his idea of sort of radical content, was to get screen printed t-shirts made up. And then 1951 of course sort of revolved around the wharf, the waterfront union, so there was a sort of syndicalist ideology at the heart of that. Whereas really there was, it was really about the Goldman Sachs, the banks and that side of things, which is why I guess the Zeitgeist things thought it was their baby too, to do with them as well. Of course the idea, the slogan, the 1% versus the 99% that's huge eh, that's an incredibly strong image, that's going to be with us forever I think. You know that's probably the biggest thing.

Byron: That's definitely the sort of meme that Occupy has imprinted on the popular consciousness now, the idea of the 1% and the 99%.

Grant: Well particularly when bloody Barack Obama is using some of the rhetoric, and you know the other side of, not apart from the you know the sort of formal political interest that I have in it too I was also involved 'cause another side of my background is the fact that I've kinda been involved in the hippy stroke love generation, and I've spent a number of years living in communes, being involved in that sort of green mentality, so I, you know the sustainability side, charging up bloody cell phone batteries with pedal power and solar power and all that sort of shit, that really appealed to me, and having their own little garden, even though it was just a bamboo framework having that geodesic dome thing, all of that stuff I thought was great, I really liked all that.

But you know I think we did probably as well as can be expected for that time, I gave as much as I could of myself and monetarily as well. That was a huge turn off for me, was in I bloody gave two hundred bucks, which was ripped off and wasted, and it was also followed up, actually three things happened in close succession, I gave that money and Rob ripped it off, then a few days later I actually went out a bought a Tino Rangatiratanga flag, donated that, got stuck up and then got ripped off the next time, by the bloody, supposedly it was Mongrel Mob, Black Power or one of those, and then the shit happened with Joe all in the space of about two weeks, after that I just had to stand back and say "no I can't" just don't have, you know the health resources or the mental resources to be able to cope with this, just this brutal knock backs one after the other, that's my lot basically. 'Cause that's really when it went off the rails, when bloody Gary ripped off that \$400 eh, that was the big, 'cause it was not pressure from outside, it was suddenly someone who was inside the camp who basically betrayed it.

And then to me what Rob did was even worse, because he was the one who was saying "I'm the one who is going to be, you know "dependable and reliable" and "I'm gonna save it" and then he basically shat all over everybody there. That's how I felt it was, I've really got no respect for that guy eh. Would really hope never to see him again, can never be friends eh after that. But it was the people like Aaron and Dave, you know, what's his name 'Gary the Maori' those sort of guys, by that point they were still trying to make a go of it, you know and that's what I've really respected, they've been shat on but first sort of the ex-students or the student types who were involved at the start and they were bad mouthing them on that Facebook list, then bloody Rob comes in and rips off two hundred bucks that had been given to them, first Gary rips off \$400 then Rob rips off \$200. I think also which I didn't know much about then the sort of alcy [alcoholic], thing came in, and there was always the sort of dubious sort stuff, are they are aren't they, drinking and doing drugs.

So it was hard, but it was bloody real, that's real world stuff, I probably would have been able to cope probably would have been in there I've I'd been bloody 40 years younger, but you know when you've been fighting really, for your place in the world, as long as I have been and had been, it's like I've had other things too I've had bloody hepatitis and had a wee cancer scare this year, you have to think about you know looking after yourself, particularly for someone who hasn't got a partner and who lives on their own.

But I, you know, I think I gave it my best shot, put as much energy is as I was able to at the time and that's the achievement, the 165 day thing. There's probably lots and lots of other things to be said about it, but I can't really think of them at the moment, what's you're next question?

Byron: Do you think that Occupy Christchurch changed anything? In the city or in the country?

Grant: Well oh the other contribution too, I did the newsletter. I think it helped leverage some issues a little bit and it also basically gave a little bit more, what do you call it, spinal fortitude, to like unions, some unions people like the Meat Workers, despite what that bloody woman says I think with the fracking issue the fact that they were there right from the start, they were making a contribution on that one as well. The fact that just whatever was going at the time we got involved in you know, jumped in, and yeah, I think it just basically gave some heart to the left, or the progressive or whatever you want to call it sort of side of things, the stuff that's been going on in

Auckland for the last 6 months or so with the GI housing situation and that, the people who are backing that up were all Occupy people, or a lot of them were Occupy people. Although that being said I think it was quite interesting that the next big protest that happened after Occupy was the asset sales, and as opposed to it being 20 or 30 people in the park suddenly it was a thousand people because you got the Labour party and the Greens and this that and the other thing kinda jumped in on that issue. I think, I don't really know why those people didn't get in behind Occupy at that time, I think it was probably like the rank and file sort of people were supporting, but not the decision makers you know, the presidents and the people at the top of the hierarchies, some of those people sorta borderline 1% people themselves really, certainly at the top of the Labour party among MPs.

But it's, you know there was so much more that could have been done and could have worked though the vehicle of Occupy, I think sort of concentrating on the bankers and talking about it just being Goldman Sachs the vampire squid, which may have been true to a certain extent, well it actually is true. But a much wider critique and a much more current critique of neoliberalism would have helped a hell of a lot, because I don't think there was hardly any of that, you know. It was, if you sort of put a continuum of people who involved in Occupy from sort of 'aware' to 'unaware' I think the majority of people would have been at the "anarchy is true..." what was it, "anarchy is true capitalism sucks" sort of end of the spectrum, none of those people have done any reading or really thinking apart from just superficial stuff, if even that. They were influencing each other, I think at that time and that was a good thing, but I wasn't really there to know what was said and done at that first third of it, apart from just going every now and again.

In that middle third of it I went to one GA a week, you know every single week of that time, for that sort of, about two and a half months in the middle. But another thing I found frustrating too, in the GA's there'd be a decision made and there'd be a strong sense of direction, and then by the time the next GA happen it would have all been lost, because it would be a different group of people again, just with different attitudes and... I think there needed to be, you know working groups that were meeting between times, actually doing the things, actually doing the work, and there never really was that. All of that being said, it was much more interesting, much more entertaining than anything that had happened for years before to my knowledge, in Christchurch.

Yeah you know I mean there's sort of all phases I look back over the years; it will be one of the top ten or top 5. There was one group I was involved with around the time of the Dole cuts in 1991 called the Coalition Against Benefit Cuts, was an extraordinarily powerful little group even though it had this very narrow remit of being opposed to the dole cuts, there was about a dozen of us who met sort of once a fortnight for eighteen months, and we were doing actions all of that time, and it was like a sort of a, there was one person from PSA, another person from, you know all these different groups, and one person from the health sector and one person from transport and it was a true coalition in as much as everyone joined in and became quite understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses, and we just went full on, we were full on for that whole time, eighteen months.

And I think even though it was sort of the worst phase of the Shipley era, I think we actually just slowed, it was like a clog, you know a clog in the wheels of the machine, and it was really

effective, and if that could have happened with thirty people as opposed to a dozen, and also with the fact of being in the park as well, that could have been so cool. 'Cause there was no, there was no you know, no point that the bloody goons came in with you know, truncheons and physically beat them up and took them away, unlike Auckland and Wellington, and Dunedin? I'm not sure about that?

Byron: I'm not sure about Dunedin.

Grant: And overseas it was, you know, viscous. But I see it as being like, one phase of the whole on-going thing, it's one thing that you list along with the Indignardos in Spain and whatever movements in Greece and one that I've been following is Uncut, even now still following Uncut in the UK their politics and their sort of issues and stuff, each of them really makes its own contribution to the whole, we probably won't know what the whole is until we look back on it in maybe 20 or 30 years.

But there were some really cool people, like I'm still on pretty close terms with Karen for one, she's actually contributed to my zine, and who else, well I still feel I'm pretty close to, well not necessarily close but on good terms with you and Kelly, and even Popx if he'd forgive me for being an atheist, Popx I used to run into all the time when he was doing that unconditional love [mural] 'cause that was on the way to the supermarket for me, from here, on the way to Countdown.

Who else was there? you know, politically now I think I feel most closely aligned with guys my age, you know there's sort of two or three of those who go to demos, there's the John Kelcher who came to the fracking demonstration but I don't know if he went to anything else at Occupy, but he's the Green, or was the Green MP or MP candidate for Waimakariri but I know him from back in the day he was actually in a band called The Sneaky Feelings, you know the one of Dunedin Double Weave he came out and did a song called Husband House and when I was doing my zine for ten years, my music zine, gave him a few positive reviews so we'd kinda run into each other over the years, and there's another guy Ian Blenkinsop who on the one hand he thinks David Icke is pretty cool, but on the other hand he is an old friend, he was actually on my label when he was on my label, always been very into wire...

So I don't really know where it goes from here. For me it's like anything that I do or that happens is a bonus, because I've lived a long and full and incredibly interesting and incredibly disreputable life, and I've enjoyed it all the way though eh, and something like Occupy, apart from sort of that brutal crap, was like the icing on the cake, it was a fun thing, I think it could have been more so and I know for a fact that the reason that Ryle sort of just stopped, just got worn down, was by Michael, you know he just got worn down by Michael's fucking "you know you gotta stop doing that, you gotta be you know should be out working all the time you know you're disgusting fucking parasites" you know that sort of mentality, I mean, which- that guy's got a problem eh and life doesn't exist for people to be out scolding other people all the time, it's gotta be fun.

Karen Austin

Recorded 7 November 2012

Byron: Ok and I'll start by asking you how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Karen: I got involved in Occupy Christchurch because I'd been following Adbusters for about a year, which- and Adbusters is a kind of culture-jamming movement with a very big online presence, and so I'd been following them for a while, and watching Occupy Wall Street build, and I didn't think it would get as big as it did, or certainly as global as it did. So when I heard that there was Occupy in Sydney I thought maybe I'd hop across there and have a look, because I'd, by that time I'd got quite excited by it. But then, somehow, I'm not sure how I found out that it was happening in Christchurch, probably on, just online, but I went along to the first march, and then dropped in and out of it since then, since it's stopped.

Byron: So you were involved right from the start? In Christchurch?

Karen: I went to the march, but at that stage I think there were, was some uncertainty about whether or not they would camp, and they decided at the march to camp. So I didn't camp at all, but I visited fairly frequently. I didn't camp because of family reasons really.

Byron: Ah yes. And what sort of activities were you involved in in Occupy Christchurch?

Karen: Some of the marches, quite a few of the general assemblies, some of the general assemblies that happened after Occupy, and also with some of the other Occupy people going around talking to some of the social service agencies and trying to get some kind of liaison happening with them.

Byron: Ah yes. And what was the reason for that?

Karen: Well, my reason was because I had a hunch from the start that Occupy would attract people who wanted to camp, but who weren't necessarily on board with Occupy principles, and that that could end up being difficult for Occupy people – like people who were homeless or people who were running away, and all of that was brought out as it happened, I'd thought that if we could talk to other agencies then they would be more aware of what Occupy was doing, and that might help them and also help us, and we could perhaps share some resources. It didn't really come off like that, but that was my hope at the beginning.

Byron: Because you're a social worker yourself.

Karen: Yep.

Byron: So, how do you think that that affected your involvement in Occupy, do you think that it would be different coming into that as a social worker than for some of the other people coming in there do you think?

Karen: It was, because... it was different, because I had several roles, and firstly I always thought that the role that I would play in Occupy was a kind of helping role, that I didn't think that I would ever be one of the main people or the main decision makers, but I thought that I would help, that I would bring resources and maybe bring information or advice, but particularly material resources,

like I could bring food and bring material things, most of which vanished, which was what I expected. I didn't give anything that I didn't expect to vanish. But it also meant that, I had several, I had that role, but I also had this role of sometimes simply knowing things that other people didn't know about some of the people who turned up. And that made it awkward because on the one hand I couldn't breach anybody's confidentiality, on the other hand I felt I had some kind of duty to keep everybody safe, including the people who I was concerned about, and I ended up knowing things that nobody else knew, and not really being able to talk to people about that, but also having to just do things behind the scenes really, so.. to help out a bit. And not being sure if what I was doing was actually helpful in terms of what I felt were Occupy principles, but on the other hand feeling that I needed to keep people safe. Quite a few people who I knew from my other working life did turn up at Occupy, and that made things slightly awkward, seeing people in a... no, it wasn't so much awkward seeing people in a role that wasn't where I normally saw them, but I thought that it would be awkward for.. It was awkward for me, for them to see me in that role and also I wanted to ensure their confidentiality and also my own privacy and that of my family.

Byron: Of course.

Karen: So I was just kind of terribly wary about, with some people about saying who I was and where I lived and that kind of thing, 'cause my family were also involved, my husband came along to a few things, and my daughter and her partner came along to a few things, so.. yeah. It was... yeah there were some awkward moments, and there were some moments where I felt that I needed to behave very professionally.

Byron: So having that sort of a role in Occupy and in your working life, what did you think of some of the attention that the media gave the Occupy campsite, because it did definitely focus on some of the negative aspects of the campsite, and I heard one talkback caller, when it was the topic on talkback, say that Occupy had created a place for all the dregs of society to gather together, and these are people who... so some of them are people you'd worked with and are the types of people that you'd worked with, so how did, what did you think of the way that the media sort of portrayed these people and their involvement with Occupy?

Karen: Well I think talkback is pretty much crap anyway.

Byron: [chuckles].

Karen: If you want to talk about the dregs of society... [Laughs]. They turn up on talkback. I think I wasn't so much concerned about the media because I didn't the media would portray it well anyway, and of the media that I saw about Occupy in New Zealand in general they portrayed it badly. Like, there was a woman who came along and did an interview, and what she focussed on was that there were no toilets and that it was cold, and said nothing about the principle of Occupy, of what Occupy was there for, the fact that it was a global movement, anything, it was just that she went along and sat in Hagley park and got cold and there weren't any toilets. I think that's a really poor standard of journalism. I was more concerned about people I knew who wouldn't have associated themselves with Occupy, who began to associate it with the people who were also seen down in the cells for example, they might have come from Occupy or were heading for Occupy or, there were several groups of young teens who were either running away from home or were

camping there, because I think it was kind of briefly fashionable to do so among a certain group, and they were often quite troubled kids, and it just became a, I think it did become a place where the police would swing past when they were looking for someone who'd breached a bench warrant for example, and yeah, I thought that was really bad. It should never have been a place to go and look for people who had offended against the law. And I'm unsure how that could've been handled better... people shouldn't have been there, because they were in breach of their bail conditions or whatever, or they should have been able to be more safe there, so that the police didn't swing past all the time. Because the police had no interest in the activism side of things, it just quickly got a reputation as a place where you can find either people or information about people. And that was wrong too, I think, the fact that not only were there people there who the police wanted, but people who could inform on people who the police wanted. So, all of that was a side of things that probably other people didn't see so much because they didn't have that other side to their lives.

Byron: How do you think the lives of those people were affected by being involved in Occupy in some capacity?

Karen: I think some of them, it did affect them. You know, like... I don't know if you'll interview Gary, but he was... he started off saying "I'm just here to help", or "here to provide security", but he ended up saying "I am part of Occupy", "I'm from Occupy" which was awesome. So I think a few people it did have an effect on their lives, and some of them tried to remain drug free, and all of that, and... I think it's very difficult because Occupy was so fleeting, it was difficult to work out what an effect it would have on their lives long-term, but they may well have come to it without any notion of what activism was, and left with some idea of what activism is, and that's got to be a gain. I dunno, you'd have to talk to them in five years.

Byron: Yeah.. yeah..

So what would be some of your best memories from being involved in Occupy?

Karen: Probably at the very beginning, where there were people around who were mostly young guys, who were people who were really different from me, I've never been a young guy, [chuckles], it's a long time since I was "young" like that, so it was just interesting being at a meeting with, like at the GA, with all these people who were just so enthusiastic and so kind of filled with.. You know the way guys compete for stories, and just that kind of energy that I'm not used to and that is really different, and that people seemed very positive and very welcoming, and it looked then like it might run for a while, and it did. So it's the beginning days that I think had the best memories for me, even though I know that there was division there, that. Like between the Zeitgeist people and some other people and... who... these were things I'd never even heard of, so I went into it like a naïve enquirer really, I'd never heard of Zeitgeist I didn't know anything about Beyond Resistance, I'd go home and Google them. And none of that I took terribly seriously, but, like it was interesting because the Zeitgeist people were kind of being pegged as a sort of right-wing subterfuge, and kind of moved on, and I don't know what was behind any of that, and it didn't really confront me. But I felt that Occupy Wall Street was at its best when it was a mass movement, or in Oakland, when again, people really took the streets, and I wanted that to happen at least once. I think that Occupy Wall Street was at its best when thousands of nurses actually marched, and nurses for me are always kind of "bell-weather" people in a way, in that they're the

sort of “decent middle class New Zealanders”, who are a pretty conservative bunch, in my view. Certainly the nurses I work with had no clue about what I was on about, but when they all went marching down Wall Street, I thought that was great and I hope that something like that would happen here.

Byron: Do you think that Occupy Christchurch achieved anything?

Karen: I really don't know. I've wondered that. I think it had the potential to achieve lots. I haven't really been involved in much since, but what I suspect is that the people who came out for Occupy have then gone back into their corners, and that those corners are roughly similar to the ones that they were in before Occupy. It may have done some good for individual people who didn't have a history of activism, or who didn't have a very political mind, who came out and did stuff.

Probably if it comes to that, people like myself, because I hadn't been involved in anything like that for many years. So the fact that Occupy called me out of my corner was something. But I think the effect it would've had would've been on individuals rather than policy making or the way the Christchurch vibe has moved on, I don't know that Occupy has had much of an effect on that. And I mean that could've been a good thing to do potentially, would've been to affect the Christchurch rebuild, or to affect how people thought about the city council. I don't know if that happened or not. 'Coz we've just got those local issues here, and I think that those, in some ways those confounded us, because they were there to be dealt with but, they weren't the same issues, or they didn't seem to people to be the same issues as people were facing globally, like yes every Occupy has its local issues and the global side of it as well.

It's difficult to know what, there needs to be some overarching principles, or ideas that inform all the local stuff, but on the other hand you can't make it so that all you're doing is sitting thinking about what's happening on Wall Street, because there's issues happening here as well. All the time people were torn between one thing and another, and often several things and I think that it stopped people moving in any particular direction. People did spurts of random things that were often fun and exciting, but there wasn't much direction and it was hard to get that. You know, like they'd debate the same things over and over and over again and there seemed to be no memory. You had to be all the time to have that kind of, like an institutional memory of what went on last week. Or even yesterday.

Byron: So something that's sort of been a theme in these interviews is that there were those sort of competing schools of thought within Occupy, and you found that yourself with the Zeitgeist and Beyond Resistance, and these other ideas that were... and I guess different ideas of what type of actions to take as well?

Karen: Yeah and that could get... people would go round and round and round with that, do we see the city council? What is our relationship with the city council? Do we defy them to the last, do we fold up our tents, do we talk to them, do we not talk to them, is it dangerous to talk to them, is it bold to talk to them, if we talk to them and they offer us something will we take it? All of those things went round and round and round and they're, I think they're terribly real issues, because it's not just about the city council, it's about how we see authority under capitalism, and how do we

see the agents of authority, such as the police, and I don't think that anybody really came to any conclusions about that. I'm not sure it would've been easy to come to a conclusion that wasn't overturned later on, or that didn't just move on as events moved on. Because in the end, events governed things for us I think.

Byron: So what way were the... how did the events affect what happened?

Karen: Well I think the moving in of, well I think the moving in and moving out of individual people changed it, 'cause the atmosphere there changed over and over and over again as different people moved in and out, because it was never big enough to become like one of those real- Like in Zucotti park there were different, quite big disparate groups you know, like there was a... one side of the park was, I gather, was kind of family friendly and activist, more openly activist-orientated, whereas the others were the mopping up of most of Manhattan's homeless. And I'm not sure how well that would've worked, but for Occupy Christchurch there wasn't really room for that, so there were more and more people who were actually "Streeties" or people who were in-between things, and of course meanwhile the housing problem in Christchurch was so enormous, and getting worse and worse and worse by the week, so that there was more... some people were thinking this is what Occupy was about, was trying to find a space for homeless people. That didn't answer your question.

So the effect of the events, the events were the people coming and going and the gradual mix of people changing over time, and in the end the city council's actions when they decided to shut it down, and, you know, the fact that people were committing offences as well. Those sorts of events.

Byron: So something else you were involved in was the Occupy Women's group that formed, do you want to talk about that?

Karen: Well I only went to two things, and from what I could see by the Facebook page people attempt to meet and then often don't seem to manage it. Of the meetings that I went to it was really good to be catching up with each other. No decisions were made exactly, or, there wasn't much sense of a way forward, although there were some suggestions that were made. Personally I'd be really keen to see things like banner drops or artistic installations or pranks or, things that could be quite small involving not many people but could make a lot of noise. And, that could be something that the women's group do. Because it doesn't take thousands of people, it just takes five or ten people with a bit of time and a sense of humour.

Byron: So what, well you've already mentioned a few things I guess, but what do you think were the reasons that Occupy Christchurch wasn't more successful as a social movement?

Karen: Partly because it became actually quite frightening for some people, especially for women and children, as the mix changed and there were more people who were frightening to people, and it certainly bothered me that hospital staff were being warned away from the place by their officials, and it was that kind of thing that stopped it gaining more ground. And the ground that it would've gained would've been more moderate ground, and probably people like myself who are more moderate thinking, or even more moderate again [chuckles]. And yeah that would've diluted things, and you know, we would've ended up with people who had concerns that were different

from the concerns of the people there such as mortgage rates or bank fees or... I dunno what concerns middle class people, but it was... yeah originally Occupy was for the... because I'm a literal thinker, I took the ninety nine per-cent thing quite literally. Like, if ninety nine per-cent includes me, and almost everybody I know, so I would've, I hoped that everybody I knew would've been able to find a place there. But they couldn't have, partly because of the camping, and partly because the message was probably just too far away from what their values are, in which case it simply may never have taken off because we're not taught to see anything that isn't in front of our nose. What people said to me who were relatively sympathetic towards it were "well it's not my concern" or "that's not happening in New Zealand" or, you know, not being able to see that it is happening in New Zealand, or that we're part of that same global system and, you know we.. The fact that we're doing relatively well out of it doesn't mean that it's ok. Yeah, so I think that it probably didn't mesh with the values of middle New Zealand, and in that case it probably wouldn't have got much bigger. But it would've been nice to see people seeing themselves as part of the ninety nine per-cent... because they are. And... that has its pitfalls as well, g this feeling of like "I know something that nobody else does, therefore I'm kind of superior morally, or politically, I'm superior because I know all this shit and other people don't". I think that has its pitfalls as well, so it was endlessly frustrating trying to tell people about it. I guess one of the issues about, for anarchists, has been what to do with the intelligentsia, and what to do with people who are sympathetic but who aren't actually anarchists and who aren't keen on the mess of the methods of anarchy. I'm not an anarchist.

Byron: Do you think that something like Occupy could happen again in this country?

Karen: Yeah. Maybe one of the things that it has done is perhaps made it a little bit easier for the same people to regroup if they felt that it was worthwhile, and a little bit easier for people to recognize something. Because people didn't recognize it, I think, as being a movement, they thought it was hippies camping. And people couldn't get beyond that, partly because the media wouldn't let them, but also because they saw what they saw, and you needed to look twice to see that it was about other things apart from hippies camping. But if the hippies start to camp again, or to do anything similar again, people will think "Ok, that's like Occupy, I remember Occupy, therefore this is something a bit like that only maybe a bit different", so it's.. It might harken back to Occupy and people will be able to recognize the next step. Perhaps whatever that is for them. I think it's different from things like marching because everybody marches, the Sensible Sentencing Trust marches, farmers march about subsidies in Europe. These aren't particularly progressive or politically interesting movement, but they march, because back in the fifties and sixties, the civil rights movement taught them to. So we've got an idea of what activism looks like, and it's marching. That's why I want to do things that aren't marching. Because there's lots of activism that isn't marching, and people don't quite recognize it as such, but I think now they recognize Occupy i.e. hippies camping as being some kind of activism, and the next thing, if it moves on from there, I think it could be quite recognizable and could make a difference.

Byron: So would you get involved again if something like that were to happen?

Karen: Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah. But it would need to be broad-based enough, and it would need to be about the destruction of capitalism, to be honest. Because, I'm not interested so much in

specific things, because all they ever do is point out small things are wrong and look like they can be fixed without making major changes to society.

Byron: Just treating symptoms rather than causes.

Karen: Yeah, and it doesn't work, because you've still got that fearful arid hell that is the system that we've got at the moment, and you know, I think... I think that that's what needs to be addressed, but also until people grasp that, then all they're going to do is, yeah is treat symptoms I suppose.

Byron: Is there anything further you'd like to say on Occupy?

Karen: I did say some stuff about being a woman, and Occupy, which actually ended up being published, which wasn't what I expected, but it was a very male place to be. And mostly I felt OK about that, because I'm older, but I don't know how it would've been if I've been younger, and the energy there was very male. Well, you know like, at the beginning for example, men would tell lots of stories that kind of out-did each other, like "I know someone who got beat up by the cops", "I know someone who got beat up by the cops times two", "I know someone who got beat up by the cops times twenty million", "I know someone who...", you know, so it was sort of boyish, and it was very charming, but it wasn't actually terribly helpful, and it was quite time consuming. I mean women are good at time consuming, god knows, but that was another sort of time consuming which just made me roll my eyes really, even though it was kind of sweet. And, I think too, the... as I've said before the way men consult is a little bit different from the way women consult, and it does tend more to giving opinion than it does to attending to the situation, and I think you do need both, and I think that perhaps because the environment was so male it ended up allowing dominant males to kind of take over, and that just meant that the thing fell apart really. Yeah... I think one of the good things too was that we did have a dignified exit from the park, and it had got to the point where a last stand wouldn't have been helpful. Like, a month ago it might've been, but by that stage it had lost credibility, and people were frightened of it and the best thing to do would be to do a really good clean-up and that happened, you know. But it's funny because of course, working in the hospital sometimes, like I'll go out there, once I finished on the night shift I try to take a walk about six in the morning, and so I just go and look at it and remember it, and think it'll be really interesting if something sprouted out there again, because it would be quite redolent for anybody who's worked in the hospital or anyone who's driven past or, they would think "oh that again", but it wouldn't be that again it would be something different, and perhaps better or... yeah... so that would be interesting to see. Yeah the site is still kind of meaningful for me.

Byron: And probably for a lot of people.

Karen: Mmm yeah! Yeah yeah yeah.

Rik Tindall

Recorded Nineteenth January 2013

Byron: How did you get involved with Occupy Christchurch?

Rik: I followed it via the news media there, the Occupy movement globally, and then when it was being organised locally, via a Facebook group, I was able to join up with that and the organising pre-meetings that happened the week before Occupy protest kind of manifested in Christchurch.

Byron: So you had attended the pre-meetings before the actual protesting camp begun, you were involved in that as well?

Rik: Yeah on the 8th of October, which was a Saturday, an alert had gone out, just the day before I think, via Facebook, that people would be in a certain place, at a certain time, if anyone was interested, and so fifteen or twenty people showed up. And we happened to meet in the CERA Marquees, ironically, outside the shut down Christchurch Art Gallery, on Worcester Street. And there was a good meeting; there was a whiteboard and some people who were keen to get going with organising it. It was also clear that they had particular things that they wanted to be doing with Occupy, and that from then on there'd be, y'know, your classic battle for idea's and that leadership within the movement. Of course, it was a movement with no leadership, but the whole history of it, I think, really bares out that it was a contest of leadership, as you'd expect, given that there were decades of a struggle with different organisations and movements that fed into Occupy. Everyone was really keen for something to happen, it's like the real big turnout we'd been waiting for all our lives, in a sense, 'cause it was highly politicised and conscious, with a purpose, an open ended purpose, so everyone was on board who was interested in protest. But, yeah, like the movement worldwide, we had a lot of things to work out, it was worthwhile. But I'm glad, Byron, that you're doing this oral history now, because, y'know, there's clearly more lessons to be learned and next phases.

Byron: So this wasn't your first involvement in some sort of activist activity? You've been an activist for quite a while now, is that right?

Rik: I'd say all my adult life. So, I was politicised in my late teens, I suppose, around the punk rock movement. Band like the Sex Pistols, in the UK, were their iconography, that they, they very much exhibited the tension between Marx and Bakunin or Communism and Anarchism. And I guess that was kind of, very much an expression of the British left, which I encountered in the 80's, early 80's, when I went on my OE. I was in London for a while, and got to see what a substantial, left wing movement in a country was like, compared to what you see in New Zealand. So, my experience in the left, in New Zealand, is against that background of what politics is globally.

Byron: So I guess, it was having that activist history that made you interested in Occupy in the first place?

Rik: Yeah, well, I think protest is what polticed people do, y'know, and all the time, unless you're pretty organised, someone else will be organising it, so you'll be following a "Wage Strike" protest or a, y'know, "Defend Workers Conditions" somewhere. Typically, that's most of the

protests that happens, union type protests. But there'll be other ones around, say, health sector cuts or education cuts, at university, that was something that I was involved in, in the 90's.

Byron: You were part of the Student's Association?

Rik: Yeah, yeah! Canterbury University, I was on the executive, or was going to be before I went on my OE, so I never actually served on the executive, but I was, in the 1990's, when I came back. I wrote a short history of the Student Association for its centenary, *Generations in Dissent*, you can find an ISBN number for it. It's in a few libraries here and there, but that was just looking at the history of Canterbury University students and where their politics were at, decade by decade. Which, yeah, I mean, a broad sweep of history is what you need to have in your head when you go into something like Occupy, because it's so big, it's so vast, there's so much potential there, that no one would miss the opportunity that it presented.

Byron: So you mentioned that the sort of contesting ideas within Occupy, and that seems to be one of the threads running through these interviews, that everybody saw Occupy as a movement where there were contesting ideas and world views and so on. What were the sort of world views and ideas that you saw as being present in the Occupy movement here in Christchurch, that were maybe competing with each other?

Rik: Well, Occupy itself, it just expressed so many things, it's like a short list I'm gonna run through and I wouldn't necessarily emphasise one thing over another. I mean, there was the youth aspect to it and the fact youth are alienated today, disadvantaged, disenfranchised, and with no opportunity in the economy, which is really the main dynamic for it, probably globally. But, alongside that there were the liberation movements coming out of the Middle East, who took the new media, the social media, the new technology and the youth skills to run it and just kicked the movement off. So, Occupy was really like a Westernised version of the Arabs' brand for the consumer market, which worked to an extent, except the company that kicked it off, Adbuster's, by doing that, I mean, there were pluses and minuses, if you like. There was an extent to which it worked, and then an extent after which it failed, and it's important to know what those factors around that were. But I do think it was like the, you've gotta look at left wing politics, or so called left wing politics, and why it's failed to achieve a revolution. And you need to, when you're looking around those idea's you come across anarchism and communism, and what the difference is between the two and then, looking around a bit further, what you find is really anarchism is the dominant so called left wing culture. Which is, to an extent, an ideology of disorganisation and I think that was the factor in Occupy which meant that it would fray and fall apart, because as soon as somebody did try to organise something, something, someone else would stop them. [Laughs] Didn't matter what it was, it was toilets for the site at one point I'm told that someone was trying to organise, but they were stopped from doing it, but it was an absolutely essential service to sustain, keep the occupation going. So, it was just futile.

Byron: So, you think the sort of idea of horizontalism and consensus decision making, which were quite big ideas in Occupy, that those sort of idea's are quite flawed and quite limited in terms of a political movement? Or organising a political movement?

Rik: Ye-ap. I wouldn't really criticise or a thing like that.

Byron: No?

Rik: I think that they are valid things to try. You've gotta try and think about what kind of society we're trying to build and it would be a decentralised society. It would be a horizontal society, an egalitarian society, and we haven't got one to compare ourselves too for a road map, so we've gotta test these methods, in the street or in the Occupation sites, and see what works. So, I can see why it was applied, but in fact, in practice, what you have is different people's views of how horizontalism is achieved and they'll assert it vigorously, at the exclusion of other people, and they might even have a lot of experience in doing that through previous movements. So, the battle between agenda's was pretty intense, and I think, in the end it just wore itself out. So, what you were left with were people who had no other homes, but to live outdoors. They were the best Occupiers of all, the people of the streets, the homeless people, or those who chose to live without homes, as they said. And it became their Occupation, which legitimately, politically, it was. No one could argue with that, except that those kinds of mainstream ideological Occupiers came back and argued with them about how they should run an Occupation! Which I thought was pretty silly and in the end when it was wound up, I think everybody could see the benefit of doing that then.

Byron: So another thread that has been running through these interviews, people talk of there being sort of different phases of Occupy, and like you just said, the last one would have been when it became predominately people who were living on the streets, whether by choice or by circumstance. Do you think that's a good way of conceptualising Occupy as having two or three phases, perhaps starting with the youth and the students and ending with the homeless?

Rik: I guess this is like the previous question that it's about kind of categorisation which I'm loathe to do. It doesn't fit the way that I see it. And the way I see it is that, we didn't have an Occupy movement, we had the potential for an Occupy movement, what we had was an Occupy moment. There's a difference, that a whole lot of contributing factors led to Occupy happening globally and in Christchurch, and for a while it worked in its own way, but didn't work in its own way as well. And, so, you went through some historical phases as a result of that, but you could just as easily say that everyone involved could finally see the light of how to work together. That it was important that the unity was more important than anything else. And also that it would be a peaceful movement, that that was something that couldn't be sacrificed to keep the unity. 'Cause that I think was what actually divided, underneath the ideological agenda arguments was a difference in opinion in between activists about whether violent methods of struggle could be entertained or were necessary.

'Cause I think that that's it, when it comes down to it, what Occupy expressed was the revolutionary emphasis of the working class, the disenfranchised, the dispossessed. It's an age old struggle and out of which, both classic communist and anarchist ideology seems to posit that the class struggle must be violent to other throw the state. And I think, what Occupy brought up, by modern means, was that A) that was never gonna work and B) it could be successful through peaceful means. I think it posed that question in front of everybody, you've actually gotta decide, y'know. When you say you're a peaceful, non-violent movement, does that mean that provoked by state forces you should fight back and try to defeat them? Because a lot of the revolutionary groups involved in something like Occupy would say that was the case, would assert that was the

case, and by actually preventing anybody else from bringing forward peaceful tactics, I think that was what destroyed Occupy. Y'know, that basic argument about what the tactics should be, what the response to state force should be wasn't something that was agreed. Although, it was very clear in the Occupy movement from its outset, that it was a nonviolent movement and for peaceful change. So when it came down to those traditional activists' getting involved and asserting a confrontational approach with the state, that was a mistake and that was the source of the failure in the movement, I believe.

Byron: So what sort of activities at Occupy were you involved with? There were a number of protests and other activities, what were you involved with in the end?

Rik: What, at Occupy?

Byron: Yes, at Occupy.

Rik: So, yeah, went along at the pre-meetings to try to be enthusiastic and get it off on a track that was sustainable, because you'd want it to still be here now, still active now, growing in strength. I mean, if it had lasted through 'til now, the whole world could have been changed! I'm sure I'm not the only person that thinks that and wants that but, it didn't happen. So, I was there in the early part, like for a week or two at the most. There was a certain point at which, there were two points in which I kind of withdrew. First, was when I felt personally unsafe, well, felt politically unsafe, that the democratic space was not being respected. That people were attempting to dominate it, run agendas and shut other people down so that could happen and not respect each individual's contributions. So, I felt -

Byron: This was at the General Assemblies or just in general?

Rik: General Assembly's I felt were regular meetings at which decisions would be taken but at them would be all the people involved between General Assemblies, so it was a constant, ongoing evolution. And there's no question that from the start, there were people who were trying to run it a certain (way), how they saw fit or how they thought it would be best for the movement to be successful, y'know, with the best of intentions. I, myself, included were contributing all our different ideas for how to get on with it, how to do it but it was very clear, that very early on that was a contest. And, y'know, the buzzwords of Occupy that would be Peace, Love, Sharing and Agreement, just weren't true. So, there was this contest and I withdrew from it early on. A) Because I didn't feel like if democratically it was a safe place, then I personally wasn't going to feel safe either. And so, I didn't actually stay there. I was a protest attender and a regular daily visitor for a brief period at the start, and then I came back right at the end. I got involved in the General Assembly again, when it was clear that it had a termination point. Things had gone bad in the camp and with the council, so it was clear that the wheels were turning to end the occupation, one way or the other. I'd kind of maintained an interest, and read, followed it all the way through, but got actively involved again at the end to try to contribute to the most beneficial outcome from it, for everyone.

Byron: Because you were involved, as well, with actually meeting with the council, weren't you, along with some of the others?

Rik: Yeah, a group of us went to the council meeting to put the case of the Occupiers in the best possible light at the end, because the council had at the meeting a staff recommendation that the camp be desisted immediately. They can't have the grounds for doing that, mainly the complaints from the Hospital across the road, that we were bad neighbours essentially. So, it was clear the council was going to act, and at that point, we went along, a group of us went along and three of us went to the table, including myself, to actually present a case for people needing help with housing. We had a good number in the camp, apparently, because people needed housing. We were talking about post-earthquake Christchurch where houses are in short supply. But also, people that live outside permanently, by choice, found that a community organised like that was beneficial compared to what their normal experience was.

So, there were a lot of positives of what Occupy was achieving, and so, we wanted to put that to the council, that there should be some constructive follow on from what had come together, socially. We did achieve some stalling, if you like, or at least, we got to organise our own departure, we weren't forced out. They gave us the choice about when we were going to leave, they didn't impose a date. We got to tell them when we'd decided to leave, and it was the following weekend, like, the Council meeting was on a Thursday, and we said "Well, we're gonna finish up on Saturday, that'll be it". The council provided transport for removal of rubbish, which we helped load, so it was a co-operative venture, if you like, to see the public done right at the end. To have their park back in a clean slate, which was really the basis of the major complaint against the camp. So, we resolved it, if you like, with the Council and, in their words, left with dignity. Because it could have been a head on battle, which of course we would have lost irrespective of how many we had there, and we didn't have that many and who we had there weren't so much class struggle activists, they were street dwellers. Who probably weren't gonna, no, actually, they were on side with the council. Supportive, pretty much, of anything that authorities would do for them.

Byron: I remember one thing that you said, that was quoted by the media around that time, was that society's problems had become Occupy's problems. Do you think that with the negative perception of Occupy, Occupy toward the end when it became largely homeless, do you think Occupy was highlighting things that were already there, like the housing crisis for example?

Rik: Yeah. Underneath the official reasons, if you like, for why we had to go, there were the unofficial success of Occupy for highlighting all inequities in society. So, things like alcohol and drug abuse, for example, that are daily parts of life in some parts of Christchurch, that would tend to aggregate in the camp. Because there was no regulation or organization to stop it happening or y'know. It was an opportunity for people to interact with users, I think we were steadily organising a community where other values could come to the surface, co-operation and good food [Laughs] and better housing. So, if we kept going, we would've - we were making progress by co-ordinating a community of people who really have no hope and were written off. We're talking people who aren't even on benefits, that just live from charity, entirely from charity. They're not recognised and they're growing in number. It's not just Christchurch, it's a much bigger problem up north, like City Mission and places like that, they make the headlines with how long their queues are at Christmas and they've gotta cut of the service. They can't actually look after the amount of need that's out there. So, Occupy really drew together that local community and contributed to its wellbeing but also to its profile. So, I think that politically there was a reason,

especially why they didn't want Occupy to continue, the authorities.

Byron: Is there anything else that you'd say was a success of Occupy, things that were successful that Occupy did?

Rik: Given that it was a moment in time which a lot of people met each other, y'know, it's the networking that's really the continuity point, if you like. Before and after Occupy happened, how well did people know other people that had the same interests and objectives in life and values and that? So, Occupy really drew everyone together in a way like nothing else. It was a really phenomenal success, in terms of suddenly highlighting the need for change in the world and bringing together those that were aware of that and it was a great, great number. At the start, you're talking 6 or 7 hundred, I think, that showed up on October 15th, 2011 for the first protest, which put down the camp but also went off on a street march. It divided right from the start, rather than focused on the collective, and the collective steadily wore out. But it was a very useful experience, I mean you can talk about these things, it's a common experience now, and that didn't exist before. So, I think that's the main achievement of Occupy, of the Occupy moment, is that we can all refer to it and keep drawing on it as a pool of experience, shared experience and social knowledge. Everyone said there would be an Occupy Phase 2, it may not be called Occupy though with the way things have gone. But the awareness is there, and people know each other. If we can just work out what the differences were that tore us apart, then we'd have a means for getting going again.

Byron: So, you think that the Occupy moment, do you think it changed people who were involved?

Rik: It let them evolve, shall we say. Yeah, it was a good collective protest experience that gave time and space for people to shift from where they were beforehand to having come out with a very rich protest experience. Yeah, individually it was really beneficial for all the protesters to be able to do it. And also for people who weren't protesters, there were many more of them, who were just ordinary people. A lot of travellers from overseas knew about Occupy in Christchurch and as tourists, that's where they arrived. Alike hearts, alike souls, if you like, and nothing else. They didn't know anyone but they had accommodation in the Occupy camp, had a common world view. But, I don't think necessarily they were political at all. They were travellers primarily, but Occupy showed that there were people trying to achieve good in the world that they could connect with. That goes locally as well... It's a good thing, we should have it every year.

Byron: We've touched on it a little bit but, do you think that being in the situation that Christchurch was in at the time Occupy started, in the aftermath of this enormous natural disaster, sort of put Occupy Christchurch in a bit of a different position than the Occupy camps in other parts of the Country or overseas?

Rik: Yes, and no. There was a housing shortage, and kind of desperation in the air, which is still here to some extent or even to a great extent. And I think that meant that there was a toleration. Occupy Christchurch was different to every other Occupy in New Zealand. It was the longest one on the ground, if I recall, other than Occupy Rakikura Stewart Island, which popped up briefly a few months ago, then faded again. But Occupy Christchurch, how did it survive so long, I think it

does come down to though that awareness, that relationship that you have with your local authorities because I think that's actually why the Occupy movement ran aground globally. Well, in the West, shall we say. Is that when we were occupying in public space, and we thought we were protesting the Government, we weren't in contest with the Government in public space, we were in contest with the public and their managers of that space, which is the Councils. If we couldn't see that difference and we got into an antagonistic battle with the Councils, we'd automatically lost, we'd lost the point of the protest. Because it was never Councils that we were against, I mean, local government, local democracy, should be one of our most prized assets that at most, we should be able to work with. So, if we can't do that in a protest like that, what can we do? I mean, we don't have Wall Street in Christchurch, we don't have Lampton Quay even in Christchurch. But in Wellington, they were near Lampton Quay, but they weren't on it. They were on public space, they were on the foreshore somewhere. I think the public, no one's silly. They know the difference. So, if you say you're protesting financial predation, but you're sitting in a park and having a battle with the council, they're two different things. We have to at least be aware of that, and be able to mitigate that dichotomy or contradiction, if you like. Because everyone else can see it, and if we don't know what we're there for, what we're on about, why should anyone agree with us and follow the movement or make it into a movement. It just didn't happen. We were too busy fighting over, about, amongst ourselves about how to organise the protest, rather than the bigger picture. It got lost. There were efforts to change that, or to keep the movement on track, such as protests through the streets to get out in the Community, or outreach in the Community in various ways, which were successful for us as a protest movement because there were still good numbers involved. But I think, in the public eye, nothing had really changed. It wasn't enough of an effort in the right direction to keep the movement growing.

Byron: What do you think about the way that Occupy Christchurch was portrayed in the media?

Rik: Well, there was a great photo at the end, wasn't there? With Julian and Natalie, together as the heart of the camp, and everyone smiling. So, to me, that sums it up. That at the end of the day, everybody saw the light side. That was when we were packing up, the day had come, there was nothing anybody could do about it. There could have been a big scrap and an argument and a conflict with the police on behalf of the council, like there had been in many other cities, which looks bad and maybe got a bigger headline but I think that expression of aroha was very much the best expression of what Occupy was. Natalie sang the Occupy song, you can find that on YouTube and that sums up just as well, the heart of people coming together to assist each other. That's really all it's about. And if the media want to portray it any other way, which they often do, because they serve corporate interests and not public interests, that's their mistake. It's an intentional mistake, a misrepresentation. And so, any little thing that went wrong with the camp, they made a big story out of. They had journalists down there, looking for bad news stories. It was very hard to get that, the big picture, the positive side of it, or the point of it across. Especially if we weren't so clear on how to do it.

You can't blame the news media entirely, because negative things did happen. Given that law-breaking of various types gravitated towards the camp and the police were happy with that. That was the impression I got from talking to residents of the camp, that they knew where everyone was. Everyone who could be camping under a bridge or in a park somewhere who they wanna keep

an eye on, it's a lot easier if they're all together in a group in a park. And so, they tended to leave the camp alone, until they were looking for someone, on the run for some offence and they knew immediately where to go. They'd come to the park and often found them. So, that's a part of, that and the council relations, it's like strategically, tactically, we gotta be smart if we want to achieve change in the world, we've gotta work with the world the way it is. Which means we're never gonna be successful getting offside with the public or their representatives in council. We've gotta find ways to work through the struggle, to build a greater mass. Which means not alienating the public or the council, finding ways to do that. I think that in Christchurch we made progress, and we were different, if you like, in that people are gonna see it less of a threat locally if it comes up again than they would in Auckland, for example, in Aotea Square. So maybe it's got more potential as a result of the way we... yeah. The earthquake conditions, I think, to answer your question, were probably a main contributing factor to that. That the Council had bigger problems to deal with, and left Occupy to run unmanaged for a greater period. Possibly, the fact that we chose a less high profile site, there was no city centre to Occupy, so we were on the margins or periphery automatically and that made it easier for the Council to deal with.

Byron: So, if something similar were to happen again, or if there was gonna be an Occupy Phase 2, do you think you'll get involved again?

Rik: Definitely.

Byron: Definitely?

Rik: I'd love to. I think the fact you're doing your oral history is a really good thing. Any way in which we can keep the dialogue going and analyse our shared history, it's the only way we're gonna make sense of it and draw out the benefits that were achieved there and build upon them. Most of the participants, I'd say, are still in Christchurch, but many not. There are quite a few international travellers, that was a major section of the group, they will have moved to other places of the world. Students, there's turnover in the student population every year, and Canterbury University suffered badly through the earthquakes so you don't have the same student pool to draw on, that would be different. But people who are self-sustaining through work and are activists would tend to still be here and be able to participate, I would think. There's less unemployed, I gather. Well, officially. But unofficially, there could be more, that want to build a protest movement.

Byron: Again on the public perception, do you feel Occupy was perceived by the public largely as being a movement for the unemployed?

Rik: Well, A), I don't think it was a movement or could be perceived as that, and B) I don't think it was about the unemployed. I think the news media, of course, would pick that side of it or it was one of the questions they were asking going down there was what do each of these individuals do that can allow them to sit in the park 24/7. And I guess from my part, a fact that I'm self-employed, have been for 10 to 12 years, means that I've got a business to attend to, a small one, but I'm not unemployed. Well, I'm unemployed to anyone else, except to computer support, which is what I respond to, on call. If I'm not called out to a job, I can do what I want, so I'd recommend to anyone self-employment over unemployment any day. But of course, you need some skills, and

the way the economy and education has gone is to remove skills from availability to people except for a high price. It's sad, it's one of the things we need to change to get community training initiatives underway and press the state for more and not just hammer hands and plasterers. Certainly, people who didn't have jobs to go to could be there more than anyone else. I know there have been people who do have work, like yourself, that were participating as well. So, there's no generalisation to be made, I think, at Occupy. It was a true, broad movement with sections like the travellers and the students, employed and the unemployed. The authentic way to look at it.

Byron: So, you feel the people there were a reflection of society and of the city?

Rik: And international.

Byron: And international.

Rik: Very much. Cosmopolitan and broad spectrum representation. In New Zealand, of course, you've got the Maori sovereignty movement and struggles around all kinds of things like the Foreshore water, now water resources, self-determination, Tuhoe. There's many, many aspects to it. Treaty, and that is a constant in New Zealand left wing politics, so, of course it was a main factor of Occupy. The fact that 2011 was the year when the Mana party was formed. Very much shared the importance, if you like, of what Occupy was trying to achieve and who it was directed to or for. That's a major factor to bear in mind, and it also shows how broad the movement was, that it could incorporate sovereignty struggle along with many other struggles like the feminist struggle, workers struggle. There were many aspects to it that were all there, all common and political parties, it was officially a place where political parties couldn't be, but you did see Green signage, I know there was an ACT speaker that took the podium at one point as well as the Mana Party, and on the periphery, I think, there were people who were sympathetic to Labour but that's a mainstream party like National, against which Occupy was pretty much counter posed. So, they never really helped, shall we say.

Byron: How did you feel about the way that Occupy sort of engaged with parliamentary politics? Because, of course, there was an election right in the middle of the Occupy camp as well so that became maybe more talked about than parliamentary politics usually would be talked about in New Zealand broadly. How do you feel about that was handled in Occupy, especially with ideologies like anarchism and things which were playing a big part in there?

Rik: Opportunity lost, I think, would be the phrase that sums it up. That there were many ways in which we were divided and confused, and that's a classic. And a general election came and went, and the image I would draw to characterise the Occupy or Christchurch's attitude to it was an illustration I saw somewhere, I think on Facebook at the time, which was of a ballot box with an open bottom, above a rubbish tin. So, that was pretty much the symbology used for how the elections would be treated at Occupy. The people, if they were gonna vote, they'd be encouraged to come down and nullify their vote. Which is to say that democracy is useless and is wrong. I think that democracy is a very important element, a fundamental element to anything that's good in the world. This is democracy with a small D though, not capital D democracy, y'know. Barack Obama, and George Bush, and John Key, and Helen Clark - not the system they lead, and use to control people, which essentially through my studies and experience, I've come to the conclusion,

is a government by criminals, of criminals.

We have an underclass that can't survive legally and that parasites people that can, that work, because we have a parasitic class on top, showing them how to do it. I think the two are integrally connected, I've come to understand that as to why growing prisons under a National government shouldn't be seen as an accident. It's intentional to impoverish people and to reduce their options, but actually to terrorise the middle. To leave them in fear, an every growing fear of their security. And that's the case in Wellington, with state centered jobs, and every middle class job in the country under threat, eroded, so that the rich can get richer, it's just disgusting and unsustainable. It won't last, there's no way it can stand for much longer, it's just not a sustainable system. So, if you see capitalism as a criminal system, then you know what our battle is. It is the battle of justice, and that's why, in the park with the unemployed and the disenfranchised, we're on the side that Jesus was on. That's how big and important the task is, the world can be changed and not only that, it must be.

Byron: It's almost a good note to end on. What I would like to ask is, is there anything else you wanna say about Occupy?

Rik: Well. Hello, greetings and thank you to everybody we met, that I met there. It's good that some time's past, I suppose, we don't have to rub shoulders so vigorously. I guess that one of the people who went in there with ideas and draw from experience that I thought were contributing, as soon as I saw that other people had different ideas and were going to stop them, it stopped me from contributing. I left. The main idea that I worked with, that seemed to be the main idea and reason why I got criticised, I think, was born out by the history of Occupy, locally. And this is about the gender issues, which time and again, whichever movement you look at, you're gonna have to deal with gender issues. It hasn't been resolved, and it must be resolved, in building the world we need, the inequity and oppression between genders. So, when I joined Occupy that was in my mind from previous experience, that if we couldn't have a truly feminist movement, of men and women, it would not succeed.

So, I did my best at the start to see a group of colleague's form that was gender balanced. If you've got a mass of people you don't know, you can at least know a small number that you're working with on a regular basis or that you've got a common purpose with. It struck me that from previous experience, you'd have gender issues, if you didn't have a gender balanced leadership. So, that was my contribution at the start, was to say, via the Facebook mechanisms, we have an administration group, it's what we've inherited from social media forms of struggle, we have an administration group. So, my contribution was to say "We should not grow this administration group, except in a gender balanced way". So, for every woman there should be a man, for every man there should be a woman. If we do that, we have some hope of not fragmenting over gender issues. And, I couldn't get that off the ground. The feminists attacked me for bringing it forward. [Laughs] That's the way it came across to me, anyway, that I was making a point out of something that had no point. But it was a fact, not only in New Zealand, that it was a youth movement and it was a young, white, males movement because we're the technologically advantaged, shall we say. And that was the main problem with Occupy in the States too, is that the bright, young guys looking for careers in a slump, tried to run a movement that was in their interests, and of course the women are gonna pull

them up on it, especially the women of class or race as well. Or LGBT, there were so many divisions drawn in from day 1, that to me it seemed like if you could at least resolve one of them, you'll be able to resolve more in the future. But, if we didn't resolve that one.

What we found was you had a clique of students who, I guess, had a strong desire for experience but they also had a sense of ownership over Occupy. And, you've seen it before in other movements, other groups, that if you get a clique, that's why you have a democratic system so you don't have a clique that is inclusive because everything would degenerate into a minority of inside knowledge and manipulation otherwise. I mean, it's the way the system runs, it's what it encourages through directorships. It's the way it works. So, we've gotta try to do something different. My point about trying to have a group of agreement about balanced gender administration for the protest was undermined by individual students who wanted to appoint people, their friends, individually, who were typically male. That was the battle. And, because I was seen in having a battle, it means I was seen as an elder. They wanted to do everything new, and I think one of the planks of Occupy was to reject any old form of leadership whatsoever, such as what I was trying to recommend from experience. That was, I think, one of the down fallings, if you like, of Occupy. If you're gonna be inclusive, you do have to keep all age groups on board and actively involved. There's a lot of experience in age, all of us need to recognise that, no matter how old we are. And it simply didn't recognise that, it was, if you like, hypnotised by the influence of technology. That if you've seen young, attractive people on the screen every day, you expect a protest movement to look the same and it's never gonna work like that. The movement is gonna look the opposite of that, when it's successful. So, I think, there was the battle to make it a broader movement, and that was very much obvious in the states, with anti-colonialism issues and the gender issues in the states, they really shredded Occupy general assembly, I think. Probably because it needed to be. We really have to focus on those fragmentation causes and say "it doesn't have to go that way next time".

Byron: Well, that's great. Thank you for your time.

Rik: You're welcome. Thank you very much, for caring about Occupy.

Richard (Popx) Baker
Recorded Nineteenth March 2013

Byron: You've suggested that we start the interview with a poem?

Popx: Yeah.

Byron: Okay, just before you read it, what is this poem?

Popx: This poem is the local version of a song that I wrote during our occupation of Christchurch, and the song 'Occupy Wall Street' is about my feelings about, you know, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and then, I think I started this after our local occupation, like after the actual camp, I'd, you know, I'd been decamped, and so, this one's, yeah, I guess this one's thank you Occupy Christchurch, the other ones' thank you Occupy Wall Street. So...

Thank you for occupying Otautahi Christchurch, mighty nurturing to find and help bring a visibly vocally locally occupied place to perch and protest on a virtually 24-7 basis.

Among like-hearted fellow seekers in our search for a better way of living, within- and -out here on the edge of safer spaces.

Oh what a way we represented Occupy Aotearoa, despite all because of our pitiful earthquake stricken, broken city scape, it meant a quick consensus to pitch our tents, in one of the movement's prettier environments. Oh corner among oak trees, sunshine between pre- and post-quake red tape.

I love the way we provided food and shelter and assembly for each other.

A wide variety of determined, curious, fun-loving-serious friendly and odd-times furious kind of in-it-for-the-minute opportunists, or down-for-the-long-haul strategists, making the most of it.

We bright-eyed and weary local and overseas travellers, I love the way we stayed, I love the way we made our stand and stood our ground and stayed and played there, well into the new year, and even long enough to see the people revolt and see that revolting pay rise not get paid before we let the relatively peaceful protest process relatively peacefully unravel us. Oh yeah, ok alright, welcome home, are we there yet?

Oh Occupy, thank you Occupy, for occupying my life. Occupy, O for occupy, thank you Occupy for occupying my life.

Byron: Brilliant

Popx: Ah, thank you!

Byron: So how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Popx: I first saw some videos on Facebook, I think it was on a site called Momentable, and I think it was Robert Strodach, I'm not sure how to pronounce his name, Rob, who uploaded some videos about, I think it was Anonymous, you know, saying "Expect us, September 17th", Wall Street and that, and I was like "Oh yeah, what's this?" you know, and then... and THEN, moving swiftly along, I saw these videos on YouTube of Occupy Wall Street, and I was just like "oh my gosh

YES” you know? Yes, yes yes yes. And then, at some point, well, a month later, so it would've been like 3 weeks later, Regan Stokes messaged me a private message saying “Oh, we're doing our own Occupy in Christchurch”, you know, “come and get involved, we're having the meeting at the weekend” and I was like, nah. ‘cause I didn't want that responsibility, you know? I thought I'm gonna watch and see if these guys do it and if they do it, then I'm gonna get involved, but not yet. And I thought, I can't get too involved because of my family situation, and like, Regan's young and, you know, a student, and I'm like I'll let them guys do what they do, and if they do it, great, and I'll just see if I can support it, but just try not to get too involved. So I wrote back to him and I says, You know, 'I'll let you youngsters do it', you know... I forget the words now, and he was like “nah Popx, come on, this is your thing, this is your thing, just come and get involved, help us out”. And I was like awww... I was kinda like nah no not yet, or just no. Or just no inside but at some point. If you, if you do it, and if you keep it up I'll get involved. So I missed the organizational meetings, and then on the day of the gathering October 15th on the global day of action I turned up with my wife and three kids and a friend; one of my son's friends and a couple more friends, I think we met up with a couple of our friends there, and that was it you know, spent the day there, went on the march and that, Riccarton Road, and yeah I brought my guitar along, I was hoping to maybe sing a song or something, ended up getting on the mic when we got back from the march, and, and then I'd, well that was it really, that was how I got involved. That's kinda it.

Byron: So right from the beginning.

Popx: Well yeah kind of, you know I didn't go to the two organizational meetings though, so all the people who were at those meetings might not see me as 'there right from the beginning', you know, but I did know about them and... yeah.

Byron: What were your impressions of that march on the first day? Do you think it was a successful sort of start?

Popx: I thought it was awesome, ‘cause it was like, there was, apparently, someone counted 'em, there was 180 people, and, you know, the media was saying there was 30 people, they obviously went down there earlier on the day and saw 30 people there, or they just blatantly lied. So then someone was like “oh now, more like 300”, and then that rumour went around, but apparently John Vietch counted roughly, and there was 180 of us. So that, to me, was a lot of people, and I was impressed with the variety of people there, you know, all ages and stuff, and I thought it was beautiful. As far as the marching goes, like, I'm not really into the traditional 'march and chant' marches, you know, coz I'm an artist, and because I'm an Aries as well, I like to do things differently, I like to do things people haven't done before – I like to do novel things. And I'm not good at following, like, I don't like being in big crowds and following. It just makes me feel uncomfortable and out of control, you know, I like to do my own thing and lead and find new ways to do and stuff, so, not the best thing, but I love supporting, I love supporting, so I made the most of it, you know, and kind of ignored those kind of feelings. But as far as the chants were... I was joining in the chants but it's not really my, my favourite thing to do. Or trying to put a bit of funk in the chants so when we were, what was it, the chant... 'we the people shall never be divided', I was quietly going.... what's the actual chant again?

Byron: Is it 'the people united will never be defeated'?

Popx: Yeah that's the one, so I was, so instead of going “the people united will never be defeated”, I was “the people united, shall never be defeated”. You know, and I was just putting a beat to it, like [skats and bops a little] ‘cause that's how I'd feel comfortable doing that on a march, where it's kinda, you know, it's got some funk to it and that you know, but, each to your own and that you know and all that, so, it was cool, beautiful day, you know, yeah.

Byron: Do you think you brought a bit of novelty to the movement with the activities later on?

Popx: Oh yeah, definitely. Yeah like, the first thing that comes to mind is when, not necessarily a good or great thing or whatever, you know, but, I noticed that... what day would it have been, oh it would've been like, possibly day 9, or something like that, we had a GA, and it was decided at the GA that we were gonna bring some flowers, each person was gonna bring some flowers to the Labour Day march, which I asked if we could call it a 'walk', and we ended up calling it walk on the poster, so that was probably my first important, in my particular way of doings things. I was just like, 'can we just make it a bit softer and put 'walk' instead of “march” for the march around the Cordon”, you know, and to lay the flowers, you know for the... I think we were on or in the quakes as well aye, cause we were marching around the cordon as well as the Labour day, that was something to do with the quake so I was like “can we make it a bit softer and call it a Labour day walk instead of march” and a couple of people agreed, and it got on the flyers, but yeah, at that GA I was... we agreed that we would all bring flowers right, and I was thinking “I don't know if I'll have time to bring a flower”, and ‘cause I've got a bit of, I don't know what you would call it, but a bit of mild... never been diagnosed, but a bit of mild whatever-it-is that makes me think that instructions need to be followed *perfectly*, you know, whatever that is... because I've got a bit of that I'm like “I don't know if I can get a flower to bring in the morning, so I don't really want to agree to that, that everyone brings a flower, and I was also thinking “there must be some other people here who were thinking 'oh I don't know if I think I can bring a flower'” you know. So I was like, I raised my hand and I was like “Ah, I just need to know, just for personal reasons or whatever, is everyone here happy with the idea of all of us bringing a flower, ‘cause I'm not, I'm thinking maybe I can't get a flower” you know, and like no-one really went “Oh yeah Popx I know what you're saying”, or, you know, people, it was just like “huh?”, so everyone else was probably thinking “Oh, it don't matter if you get a flower”, it's just like, if you bring a flower you bring a flower, but generally just if you can bring you, whereas like, but, you know... So, just that kind of questioning about things that aren't necessarily important but which were important for me, which would've put a little bit of a different spin on things, ‘cause I was the only one who said it, and you know, just that sort of little thing like little questions that mattered to me.

Oh and also, I think... another thing that, when in GA at some point, probably after about 2 weeks, maybe day 14 or... might've been further along, but, I think it was Dean Crawford that was suggesting that everybody be woken up in the mornings with a whistle at a particular time, and I was like “I'm not staying in a tent at the moment, I haven't got my own tent, but I just wanna make clear that there's absolutely no way that I wanna be told what time to get up in the mornings, if I DO stay.” And I had stayed, I think I'd stayed by that time a couple of times of something, but I was like “there's no way I want someone telling what time to get up, it's just not what this things about for me, you know”. And I could see the benefits of that, but the way I felt personally, for me, obviously ‘cause it was my feelings, outweighed that, you know, outweighed that idea that I

could also see would work if we did it that way. But, and it would've been cool, it would've been nice to see if we did do it that way, how it would've gone, but nah, that's just not my nature, you know, to be told what time to get up, if I go to bed at like 3 in the morning and then am being told to get up at 7 or whatever by a whistle, "come on get up", I'm like "no way, I'm an adult and... sorry, I'm just not getting up and I don't want to be arguing about it", you know, in the mornings, yeah so I was just like straight away, like, no way, I'm not supporting that, you know.

And then, in terms of other sort of novelty, yeah I think so but it's hard to tell. I mean I know I did, I know I did, but then, you know, I wonder, in answering that, how much ego comes into it, because we all experience life through our own being, through our Selves, so probably each of us, probably most people feel like they are different to everyone else, so they try and fit in and stuff, you know what I mean, and I don't really try that much to fit in, ehmm but... you know obviously I felt different to everyone else, I imagine that most people felt different to everyone else, and the people who support this kind of thing are people who care... if they were so busy trying to fit in they wouldn't necessarily be there, so I imagine everyone felt that they brought something novel to it even if they weren't necessarily put in that hat, you know, even if it was more of an introverted thing, just by being there. Even people who were quiet were influencing it in a big way, you know, so yeah... you know.

I thought, another thing I could mention is that, I felt like, you know towards the end, that I was one of the few people who were there from day one who were still supporting it like it was day one, you know, like, when I turned up on day one I was supporting whoever was there, and like, on the last day, I was supporting whoever was there, you know, so I was one of the few, and, yeah and the novelty of... you know like, I made a load of banners towards the end when I felt that the actual protest side of it was really lacking and I saw no way that the camp could be de-camped, you know, because people were saying "aww do you think we can decamp" and a few of the people there were still saying "there's no way that's gonna happen, we're not moving" so I was like ok, you know, I need to support it, so I just made like five or six banners one day, you know, took them down there for the guys who were there, you know, just to, yeah to support, and that was a bit of a novel thing at the time, you know, coz it could've always, gone any way sort of thing, you know what I mean, depending on contribution from everyone, you know, yeah.

Byron: Did you find it was quite a diverse group of people involved in Occupy?

Popx: Oh yeah!! yeah [chuckles], yeah, definitely.

Byron: Definitely... did you possibly... come to interact with people you might not usually?

Popx: I'm always quite, you know, I've got a history of just talking to anyone anyway, you know, given the opportunity, so not necessarily, but it's just what I was looking for, you know, like.... I'd been in Christchurch since October, November, maybe November 2008, and you know, I wanted to get into the community, 'cause that's what I'm into you know, the arts and everything, so I organized a Mother-and-Child themed exhibition, one piece per person, I invited people to include stuff, I got 94 contributions and I made a book about it, and that was my way of getting into the community in a way that I wanted to be, rather than being waiting around and, I don't know, like, get told to go and get a job and meet people that way or... some other way. I wanted to meet

people on my terms you know, so I created this art exhibition and I met people through that - that was awesome. And then, I guess, and I got some good friends through that and that, and I guess yeah Occupy was the next big thing for me in terms of meeting people, and that was how I wanted to meet people as well, coz that was my, I was like, my two, two of my... things about me, I've got my spirituality, I've got my activism, and I've got my art, and then my family, that's kind of how it is you know, and I've just got my silly playful nature within all that but , so yeah it was just, just.. perfect was of doing what I would've done somehow, you know, just met people who I relate to in some way, you know, similar to what I say in my poem you know, "Like hearted fellow seekers in our search" sort of thing, you know, "for a better way of living within and out here on the edge of safer spaces", so yeah, you know, and like, you know, what I feel for people, the situation, the injustice in the world, what I feel, you know... so strong that, to me other people who care about that stuff, you know, aww it's just incredible, it's just incredible you know, it's just awesome, that's kinda why I didn't want to be there straight away, I didn't want the responsibility you know, I wanted to see what it would look like without me there, you know. And I was kind of hoping that all the way through I would just be, you know, just one of the many people, ideally, that's how I would like it to be, you know, people, towards, as it got on over the months, people were, you know, a couple of people said to me "Oh, you *are* Occupy to me", and I'm like "what?" you know, like, when Remi put me on the flyer, a silhouette of my figure on the flyer, and he.. I was like "no....", 'cause I don't wanna... I wanted to do all I could for Occupy Christchurch, but I didn't want to represent it, I didn't want to be the poster boy, you know what I mean, and yeah, I think, when I was talking to people about that, when Remi made the flyer, you know, another person, I think it was Christine, she says "oh yeah but like when I think of Occupy I think of you" you know, and I was like "Really, oh man, I kind of don't like that, I want it to be Us, you know"? But it's like, yeah, it's just one of them things, when that responsibility comes, you know, you just have to accept it, and just get on with it, you know, so... I forgot what the question was now!

Byron: It doesn't matter.

Popx: Yeah, was it the one about diversity or?

Byron: About diversity, yeah... yeah I guess you were seen as quite a significant figure in Occupy, I know doing this project, when people say "oh you know who you should interview", your name is one of the ones that comes up a lot from people, so people did see you as a...

Popx: Yeah like I said, kinda... I would prefer it not that way, you know, I'd love to be, you know, Me, with my passion, and my strengths, you know, my weaknesses are there as well of course, but with my strengths, and know that there's like, 50 other people, similar, you know, can be completely different, you know, but with similar passion and involvement really, you know contribution, yeah, that would be awesome, 100, 200, the more the merrier, you know, that sort of thing. But that's how I see yourself by the way, genuinely, you know what I mean, like me, the same kind of passion and strength you know, you're doing this, I was doing my, you know documenting you know, so yeah, and you know, others, I do see in the same sort of, you know... yeah... yeah, ah also, one of the things I think I'll mention anyway, on that sort of, along those long lines – like Gary Green said to me one time, "Aw yeah, you know, you're like, you're the person, you know, you're the man or whatever, you're, you know, you've got the love or whatever,

your....”, and I was like “...what?” ‘cause this would've been probably before Remi made that poster and stuff, I was like “What? No!!” You know, and like, I just looked across and I saw Ryle, and I was like “No, Ryle bro, Ryle has got love same way, you know, Ryle is the man same way” You know, and he was like “No no, but you” you know. And at the time I was like, “oh man” you know, “I hope not”, you know what I mean? And then when I think about it now I'm like, I think, Gary was probably scoping us out to see if like, you know, I don't know, but I think a bit, ‘cause you know about Gary, that people have spoken about him, you know, bless him. You know he was probably had his, I don't know if he had his intentions of stealing the money or whatever, you know, but he was probably, coz he was, around them times, “Popx I cannot believe that people are giving me keys to the safe”, or whatever he had keys to, you know what I mean? “I've got keys..” he was like “Everyone's giving me..”, he's like “I've just come out of jail or whatever”, he's like “And people are trusting me, it's strange”, and I just thought, aww cool, you know what I mean like, that's nice, you know what I mean, I thought, it's sweet, and I didn't think he had any plans for doing anything dodgy, and maybe he didn't, but he probably just had concerns, he was probably just a bit worried about what he might do, but you know, when I think back to him saying that to me, “Aw you're the man” and everything and all, was he just trying to scope out like, oh who are the leaders, so he can, you know, that sort of thing. Like the... what to call them, not necessarily the police, but the, people who want sort of to bring an end to movements, find out who the leaders are, get rid of them and weaken the movement and that sort of thing, just on a smaller, individual level. But nah, Gary's lovely, bless him, and he's obviously got a few mental issues and all that stuff so, not a problem you know, not really. Yeah. And probably true of me, a few mental issues as well I reckon. It's all good.

Byron: Do you think Occupy was successful at being, sort of 'leaderless'?

Popx: Yeah, I think so, you know, apart from, like, what I was just talked about, people projecting onto other people. Yeah I think it was awesome, I love that, if I look at it through that frame of reference, you know, that's what I love about it, you know, it was awesome, it was awesome, oh my gosh yeah. You know. I think I'll just mention that time when, when that person, that man Richard, another Richard, said that he thinks that we should change our Safe Spaces policy to include alcohol consumption.. I don't know whether he was saying, in tents or just, you know, generally, as long as we, I don't know, behave or whatever you know, don't get too drunk or whatever he was trying to say. And, you know, and I think I'd not seen you for a little while, maybe I had, you know, but you just came in on and I was thinking how's this going go, ‘cause I was feeling *The Pressure*, coz I think he was... by that time you people were going “oh yeah Popx this Popx that”. So, I think he was like, oh yeah just gotta.. just gotta basically talk Popx round to it and then it's a go, you know what I mean so, I kept feeling like, he kept coming up to me and going “oh yeah nah we've changed it now, we've changed the rule or whatever, we're allowed to have alcohol now” and I was like “What? Like, has that gone down in GA?” and he's like “Aw nah nah, we've changed it, like we've decided at camp like, you know, that's it now”, and I was like oh right, oh right, we'll just have to do a GA about it then, and he's like oh no oh no, it's changed. And then we eventually got round to saying we'll do a GA about it, and then you turned up, and you was like “I'll, I'll..”, what's it called again, when someone takes..

Byron: Facilitates?

Popx: Facilitate, you know, and you was like “I’ll facilitate”, right, ok, who wants to change the Safe Spaces policy to alcohol consumption? and we went round everyone and, he was the only person who said yes, you know what I mean. That was awesome, the fact that you came and did that, it was just awesome, you know like, otherwise it could've been a bit vague or whatever you know, you just took charge when it was needed for that GA, for the moment, for that issue you know and it was just awesome. And any time anyone did anything like that, you know, took responsibility and asserted their individual power or authority or just, passion you know or whatever it is – loved it you know. Especially if I agreed with the sentiment you know, there was a couple of times when I didn't, but probably not worth mentioning, nothing I can think of that's necessarily worth mentioning on that one, although I have mentioned a couple of things, you know, definitely not worth mentioning like, the flower thing you know [chuckles]. Except for the reasons that I did mention, yeah.

Byron: So were the general assemblies like a big part of the movement?

Popx: Oh yeah! Definitely. For me that was my favourite thing at first, right, that's what I used to talk to people about for the first couple of weeks, ‘cause I think we was having GA like every night, or something aye, and then it changed at some point to every two nights or something. But yeah, people who I was, my friends or my, people that I talked to outside of Occupy I was like “Aw you gotta come to Occupy man to do these meetings where everyone gets listened to, it's awesome, come on you gotta come”, you know, and that was my thing you know, I loved that. And yeah, it did keep it, I think, yeah it gave it that stability, that rhythm, you know, and yeah, that ceremonial nature of returning to the start of that pause and then seeing what happened in between the GA's and all that stuff.

And you know I understood people who were sick of GA's, just saying like nothing gets done and stuff. I don't know about nothing gets done but I just understood some of the frustrations there, but yeah, I made sure throughout the whole thing that I visited as many GA's as possible. And yeah, towards the end it was almost only the GA's that I was attending, just like twice a week I think it was on maybe a Thursday and a Sunday, or a Monday and Thursday or whatever, you know? And, yeah it was great. Little bit frustrating when I really wanted to say something and I had to wait, you know, just like, four, five people who already had their hands up to speak and have to wait, and then by the time it came to me I'd forgot what I wanted to say, or just wouldn't be understood in the context that the conversation had got to then, but, you know that sort of thing. But, nah it was beautiful, it was beautiful, and knowing that people were doing GA's up in Auckland, you know, and in Dunedin and in Wellington and around the world, you know, that was just beautiful, that was, Occupy was like, yeah, GA's... I can't think, well I guess just GA's and everything else, but I used to just see it as GA's.... and something else, but I can't think of what the something else is now, whether it was the marches, the camp, the whatever, you see, it was GA's and something I can't remember now but yeah, GA's. GA's were good, yeah.

Byron: And of course there'd be a lot of discussion happening outside the GA's as well, for a while there was the general Korero...

Popx: Ah yeah true yeah yeah true, that was like at the start when it was really excited and some of us wanted to stay up all hours, just talking after GA you know, just carry on, see what

happened.. and plus without that structure, you know, without the necessarily having to wait until it was your turn to speak, you know, so if you was passionate about something at the time you could just speak, and that sort of thing you know. Yeah, yeah I was doing that for a while... GK's [chuckles].

Byron: Something that other people have talked about is Occupy as being a place where there were all sorts of different ideas sort of competing with each other and all sorts that were together, did you find that, being involved in all these GA's and discussions, that there was sort of, people bringing in different ideas and...

Popx: Oh yeah, absolutely, from day one I knew that, that's what it was about, you know, it's like, it was just, it was... you know I'm trying to think of a word that could explain it, I'm just thinking of any word that expresses how, how just... phaw! I don't even... I can't think of a word, 'cause I'm thinking of things like insane, but I know our Kelly has said come on guys let's not use words like crazy and insane to describe things and that so you know, I've mentioned it but I'm not saying that, but... and I don't know if that's the right context that Kelly meant when she was saying, you know, let's not use those words, but, it was like oh my gosh, how is this gonna work, it's kind of not gonna work, but it is gonna work, 'cause it is what it is, you know what I mean, like everyone's coming with their own personal agendas, everyone's coming with their own backgrounds, everyone's coming with their, you know, prejudices and all that kind of stuff, and, wow, you know, and that's what was so good about it, as well as that being, you know, the downfall, that's also what was keeping it going and going and going and going, you know.

Yeah. In terms of the competitive side of it, you know, I'm not into competition. My ego... I love a challenge, and my ego loves to be better than everyone else and that, but ideally, you know, I'm not into competition, I'm into cooperation, you know what I mean? So, yeah, the two were side by side, and yeah, you know, it was a recipe for disaster, it was a recipe for just awesomeness, and it all happened you know, it all happened. It's like, just life you know, a little microcosm of life, it just all happened. Yeah you know? It's beautiful!

Yeah I mean I'd really... while I've got the opportunity, I do, I DO wanna emphasize how awesome the diversity was, you know. Incredible. Just, would've been even awesome if there's more, you know, could always, there's always more for it but nah, it's like nah, we've had the camp and you know the teachers are protesting, you know what I mean at the Novapay, and about school closures and mergers and, you know, it's like all the things that I did desire while I was there, you know, we'd all come together you know, it's happening! It's happening anyway, you know what I mean? Like with the Tony Marriot thing towards the end of it, you know, it's all happening you know, isn't it, and it's not like I desire problems, just for the sake of protesting, but the problems were already there, and it's all coming out you know, and so people are protesting, you know what I mean? With all the insurance issues and, you know all the protests that have occurred you know, with the housing and everything you know, so, it's great you know! It all goes on, and the diversity is all more and more, you know, even, I'm sure National voters are not happy with the asset sales you know, some... lots of National voters probably. You know, I don't know how many's lots, but definitely some National voters won't be happy with the asset sales, you know what I mean, 'cause a lot of Kiwis are very Nationalistic, you know, care about New Zealand as an entity, and they

want, you know, they want New Zealand to be New Zealand owned etc. you know, so, all that diversity it's just growing you know. And I remember towards the end I didn't really.. got to the point where we're doing GA's at the WEA that, you know, I announced in one of the GA's that I really don't care about the name Occupy like, lets, you know, I just didn't anymore you know. I love the name Occupy, I Love it and I'll always love it, I will truly always love the name Occupy, 'cause it is an instruction as well as being a noun, you know, so, I'll always love it but, at that time I was like 'nah, let's just refocus on the meaning, you know, the Kaupapa, the mission, and not get caught up in the name really, and everything that the name meant. Well, the name-meaning side of it you know. Yeah.

Byron: So what were some of your favourite things that happened at Occupy? There was the GA....

Popx: What was my favourite things... mmmm, wow...

Not necessarily what.. I'll mention this one 'cause this one comes to mind, but I think there was probably others which were probably more favourite but when I heard about Tony Marriot deciding not to take that pay rise, that was beautiful, you know what I mean. For me, that justified everything what we were about, to me, you know. Because to me, Jalanda's poster with the guy standing on top of the planet, with the money bag, you know with his top hat on with his big smile, and the two people underneath the planet holding it up you know, and it says you know "is this the world you want"... and then it said something else down the other side, I can't remember right now, to me that summed up Occupy, I loved that, you know, to me that is the Occupy emblem. Occupy Christchurch emblem. Apparently it was designed by Wilfred, and I think Ted, and Jalanda, those three, it was either Ted and Jalanda or Wilf' and Jalanda, or Ted and Wilf', and then you know and Jalanda painted it on the cardboard on, I think it was the Labour Day walk day, and then she did another version, 'cause that got all raggedy and stuff, you know what I mean? To me that's Occupy Christchurch emblem, you know, like mission statement, kaupapa visual. So, the Tony Marriot thing man, that just typified it and yeah awesome when he gave that back I was like, "yes!" you know what I mean, 'cause by that time we had a lot of bad press with the assault, you know, the sexual assault thing that was going on, and just.. you know, oh yeah the hospital stuff, that stuff that was going on, so it was like, ugh, like I didn't care if we didn't get the immediate justification, 'cause I know it would come eventually, but it just came like that you know what I mean? It's like those few thousand people gathered, protested next to Council building about the Tony Marriot pay rise, and he, at first he was like "nah, I'm not giving it back" and then just before the protest, you know, a few days before the protest he said "ok", you know, "I won't accept the pay rise" 'cause he didn't need it, basically, you know what I mean?

But the people said right, we're still going to protest, you know what I mean, so they did, and then, just awesome. So that was kind of one of my favourite moments, because I was... I had some like stress in my aura at times, I was stressed a little bit at times about Occupy, you know, around those times. So yeah, that was just lovely, so in terms of other favourite things, aww, I'd have to go back to near the start to really.

I guess.. oh the Labour day walk was beautiful, there's other stuff which I can't think of now which were really sort of magical to me at the time like, which meant so much like, awww I've just kind

of thought, I think... probably my favourite, probably my favourite sort of thing which really boosted... what happened was I was meditating in my back garden there like I do every morning right, barefoot, on my grass there sitting on a chair underneath that Oak tree, and, underneath next door's Oak tree, and, it would've been.. what day would it've been? It was early on. 'cause what happened, the first week of Occupy I was working in youth justice right, so I couldn't stay, I had to get up every morning early and go to work, 'cause I only do school holidays. And the first week of Occupy was the last week of the two week holidays. So I did my first week, and then on my second week it was like I was free to stay at Occupy if I wanted to so, I could expand my mind and just let go and think "wow, if I wanna stay at Occupy I can stay at Occupy, I can put into it like I want to, if I want to, like they're doing in New York, like's spreading across America and Europe, and here it is in New Zealand and, you know, and I can do that. So, I was in meditation and I was just.. my mind was just thinking about just aww I was just so engulfed in just gratitude for what the guys were doing at Occupy. Like, they'd been through the rainstorm and everything the week prior, they'd survived it, they were still there, you know, and I was just so grateful... aww and it was, you know, it was just like.. pfff it was just gorgeous and then I was thinking, it came to me about Dave Dobbyn's song "Welcome Home", and I was like "yeah!" Like, that should be our theme song.. that's right, I think.. maybe Polly, had posted, like, does anyone know any songs that we can play on the march or something, so I was like.. well at some point it came to me, Welcome Home, Dave Dobbyn, and I was sitting in meditation and I was like "yeah!" and then, I was like "perfect, like, Occupy – Welcome Home", you know, like, to me it was like sub-heading, and so when I made my short films, they were called Welcome Home, Are we there yet, O for Occupy. So, welcome home, this is home, are we there yet? Question mark, you know? Not necessarily. Is this how you want your home to be, do we need to move the furniture around, or whatever needs doing? You know. But yeah, I was in meditation, and buzzing about that, so it was just like, an emotional, just orgasm, just my whole world was just like a constant orgasm sort of thing at the time. And I went to Occupy that day I think, and someone had chalked on the path "Welcome Home", and I was just like oh my gosh, you know what I mean, I was just... you know, I was still there, orgasming or whatever, you know, so like.. and a few other things had been written, and I can't remember if I found out straight away, but ah yeah, I went and asked, I went and asked, and I think, I found out relatively straight away, like that day or soon after, it was Rob Strohdach, or I'm not sure how you pronounce his name, but it was Rob, who'd written it, you know, and I was like "what, when did you write that!" and he was like "this morning", like, he'd.. I think he'd done security that night, and.. or he was up early, you know, and he says, you know, he was just thinking about it, and he just wrote it on the path in chalk! And like man, I was like "I was meditating this morning thinking about that, like". So that was it you know, I was just like, I was in love with Occupy, you know, and yeah so that was kind of a pivotal moment for me, that was enough fuel for me, to just keep me going through the whole thing, you know, that was kind of it, I guess! you know, I'm sure that's just The Truth, you know. 'cause it was such love and it was such beautiful beautiful feelings that that was all I needed, no matter what else happened, that was it, you know, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

And then there were just a lot of cool things that happened [laughs joyfully].

I'll mention another one, another awesome thing, was when Rik represented us at the council

meeting, you know, when we went to find out when the council voted to remove us. And to see Rik, and to see Big Gary, and to see Wiremu representing Occupy Christchurch, Otautahi Christchurch, in front of, you know Mayor Bob Parker, and Tony Marriot, and Yanni Johanson and Glenn Livingston and Peter Beck and the other counsellors, and just doing, you know, just representing. It was beautiful, it was really beautiful, because if it wasn't for Rick, I don't know what we would've done, and it would've been OK., of course, but you know, it was good to have that image there of the typical 'older white male', alongside you know, the older Maori males, it would've been nice to have a female there on the day, we didn't have any females at the council meeting, Jo didn't want to go because she thought she'd probably just be too upset, you know, for various reasons, and no-one else was available at the time. But yeah, to have Rik there, and then, we way he represented to the media as well, it was just great, you know what I mean?

So, for all those people who were so stuck in their stereotypes of just like, you know, not that you have to pander to that stereotype at all, but it just helped me personally, you know that like, you know, yeah the stereotype like.. “White people are responsible” and all that stuff, you know what I mean, and “males are...”, you know or whatever. Yeah it was just good to have that. It would've been even.. I guess it would've been even better if it was a female, you know, maybe, but... no I'm just really appreciating what Rik did at that time, and yeah that was just Awesome. And yeah just so many beautiful things you know, so many beautiful things like... oh my gosh. Ohh gosh! So many, I bought like.... this lady used to come and bring us food, oh what was her name? She told me her name.. I forget now. I've got a photo of her, actually holding out a cake that she brought for us on Christmas day I think it was, or Christmas eve, and.. I forget her name, but she used to bring us food, and yeah that day when she brought us that food, and like, I think it was straight after this nurse came, and she was like “thank you” the nurse was like “thank you SO much for what you're doing”, you know, “if I was 20 years younger I would be doing things” like, “we really appreciate what you're doing for us” and, she gave us like fifty dollars, or a hundred dollars or something and I think... it might've been twenty but I think it was fifty, might've been twenty, but I think the person who she gave it to were like “aww no no, maybe you don't need to give us this”, she's like “no, I'm telling you”, you know, “you're representing what matters to me”, you know. And then, you know another time which I've got on one of my films, my film “That's the thing about unconditional love”, 'Occupy That', which I made about my mural that I did, during the occupation that six months, there's a scene near the beginning where this guy came up on a bike and.. while we was in GA, and I went over to speak to him quietly and he was like “I just really want to tell you that what you're doing is just so necessary and I really really want to thank you, and just really want you to know how appreciative we are with what you're doing, it's not just you guys, I want you to know it's not just you guys, you know, there's people supporting, no matter what the media say, no matter what other people are saying in the comment threads, any right-wing people or whatever, it's like just know that there is people out there, REALLY appreciating what you're doing, and I asked him if I could turn the camera on, and if he'd say some of that stuff again, and I did and he did, and you know, so I put it on my film and that.

But yeah, every time people brought us food, that was one of my favourite things, like, ‘cause to me, you know, I was like I was supporting Occupy, that was my thing, I was supporting the people. It's like support the supporters, it's like, the people who are standing up for justice and

equal rights, support those people you know, so, when someone brought food, they were my heroes, you know. The people who were occupying were my heroes, like, the first week, the people who were there camping they were my heroes. Then when I was like, part of that, you know, when I was, you know... you know, I was one of those people, so I was my own hero as well. It was like, the people who brought us food man, I was just like oh my gosh, you know, do you realize how awesome you are!? You know? Gosh, yeah, 'cause that was one of my favourite things that I saw about Occupy Wall Street, on the videos, that was one of first videos I saw, the kitchens, what they'd set up. And, you know, I think I must've cried when I first saw the Occupy Wall Street videos, with the kitchens and stuff, you know. So, yeah, it was just beautiful you know, it was just beautiful. Everything about it, apart from the things that weren't beautiful was incredibly beautiful, you know. Yeah. [Laughs warmly] I can't remember the question again.

Byron: That's alright. Do you think that Occupy changed Christchurch at all?

Popx: It must've done, you know? It must've done. I know there's people who still don't even know about it, you know, there's people I've met who are like... most people are like, you know if people don't know that much about it they're like "ohh that thing with the tents, I didn't know what that was about", I've met a couple of people like that, I think I've met people who were like "oh nah, I just don't even know about that, why, what was it?". But, most people... I dunno, I dunno if it was most people who knew about it, you know what I mean but, yeah, hundreds and hundreds of people passed through it, and it's hard to quantify something like that, 'cause to me, every single individual, every single individual's life is of like, utmost important, so, I could use myself as an example, or I could use anyone else as an example and say "if it changed that person, then it changed Christchurch", you know what I mean?

Because who knows what we're all going to go on to do, you know, and we could've all gone on to do completely different things, you know, right, and Christchurch has enabled us to do what we're doing. I mean Occupy Christchurch, Occupy Otautahi Christchurch has enabled us to do what we're doing today, you know, I've met some awesome people, some of my literally best friends, who I hang out with, I met at Occupy, and.... it's just inspired me so much, you know, so in my life, yeah like I say in my poem, thank you for occupying my life, you know, Occupy Christchurch occupied me and my life. And it occupied my family's life, you know, and, so yeah, if... even if it was it was just me that it's changed, then it's changed Christchurch. So yeah, for all of us, for the hundreds of people that passed through there and came into contact with it, absolutely, you know, and I know that those people who protested against Tony Marriot were touched by us in some way, a lot of them were, you know? And they were encouraged and emboldened and all that stuff, you know, to protest, whether it was like "oh well if them hippies in the park, layabouts can do it then we can do it" you know what I mean, or whatever it was like "yeah them guys are awesome, they've done it", you know, "I can't do that, I can't go and camp out in a park or support that, 'cause I'm not sure that that's the best way to do things, but I can do this", you know? "I can do this", so yeah, so, and now, I think even people to this day, you know, teachers and you know, all the people you know like the guy who recently set up his truck thing with his comfy sofa chair and his coffin and says I'm not going to eat until my insurance company deal with my insurance, you know, it's been over 2 years, not cool, to put it lightly, so I'm not eating. There's my comfy chair, there's my coffin, I'm gonna sit in that comfy chair, and I'm going to be laying in that coffin

unless my insurance gets dealt with, you know, I'm sure even if it wasn't directly through Occupy, if he never, if he was one of the few people who didn't hear about us, he would've been touched by people who did hear about us and were inspired in some way to act, you know? And to give him that confidence and you know, and just that... you know like DIY if no one's gonna help me then I'm gonna help myself and I'm gonna help everyone else, 'cause I'm sure he wasn't just doing it for himself, obviously if he's just gonna put his life on the line then he's thinking about other people as well, you know, so, yeah, I would just have to say “yeah, it changed Christchurch”, you know.

And, you know, the other cities throughout New Zealand who heard about us, you know, you know they were strengthened by us and so, you know. And they're gonna visit Christchurch you know, and all that stuff, you know, I mean, people up in Auckland, you know, like, it's even.. the relationships between Auckland and Christchurch have grown, you know? Some strong characters in different places have come together through that, so not only has it changed, it's changed Christchurch in many ways, including the way people in other cities interact with Christchurch, you know? So, yeah.

Byron: Would you do it all again?

Popx: Yes, absolutely. By that I don't mean that if someone called an occupation tomorrow that I would...

Byron: [chuckles].

Popx: I don't mean that, I mean, I'm happy with what we did. Yeah, and to reach this point, you know, if I went back in time I'd just go “yes! Get on with it”, you know, carry on, awesome.

If someone called another one, again, I'd probably just say “no, 'cause I've got other things to think about”. I've just remembered like that initial message from Regan, you know, “come on Popx, you'll love it, this is your thing” and I was just like... oh I can't remember what I replied again, but I was kind of trying to tell him “I can't risk my family situation it's a bit tricky, so no”, right? And I'd probably say the same thing again, “no I'm not doing it”, but really it would be to see what everyone does without me, you know, but I know that I would just have to get involved at some point, you know, absolutely. Probably on day one, once I'd seen that people are serious.

So, yeah, but ah yeah having remember that I thought I'd mention this, 'cause it was a big part of my Occupy Christchurch experience, which was, yeah like I says to Regan... ah that's right, I said to Regan “I'll leave it to you young free and single types”, 'cause you know, I imagined it was like students and that who'd organised it, you know, who were planning to organise it, to have the organisational meetings and stuff right, so I said I'll leave it to you young free and single types so I just imagined them guys camping there like in Wall Street etc. So, what I was talking about was sort of like my fragile relationship with my wife, you know, 'cause I'd been on the internet checking out Occupy Wall Street almost constantly when I was at home you know, just seeing all the developments, all the new videos, watching television, news and sort of stuff know what I mean? Absolutely loving it right, and, you know, knowing that my wife was getting a bit frustrated with how much time I was putting into it before Occupy Christchurch even started, so... and then, after about... I think day one was on what, was it a Monday, day one? 'cause I remember me on a Monday right here on a Monday.

Byron: It might've been, I can't quite recall, yeah.

Popx: Unless that was the Labour day one.

Byron: It might be the Labour day one, yeah.

Popx: We changed the words for it, yeah, it might've been the Saturday. And then, so, the Saturday, we got to the next Saturday, and I think it was the Friday after that...

So, it was the Friday after that, and I was on the internet checking out Occupy, and my wife says to me “we need to have a talk” and I could feel that it was serious and I looked at her and I was like “what” and she was like “I think we're gonna need to..” oh I forget the words she used. She was like “we're gonna need to split up” or whatever, I can't remember the words she said. And I just looked at her, and she was like “unless you're prepared to go to marriage guidance counselling” or whatever, and I was like well “I'm not prepared to go to marriage guidance counselling, I can see what's going on between us, you know, and if that's how you feel then I'm gonna support you in it” you know, and she was like, obviously she was like, “well that's not cool and I want you to come to...” she didn't say that, but that's what she was feeling like - “I want you to come to marriage guidance counselling”, you know what I mean? It's not working and all that. And I was like well, I can see it's not working if you're saying that, you know. But I thought that it was about the fact that, kind of all I cared about at the time was Occupy, you know what I mean? At the time. Kind of. You know, obviously I cared about my family as well, really, but my focus was on Occupy. And so, so then it got to the point where she was like “alright, you can go and live at Occupy”, and I was like “No, I Live here with my kids”, she was like “No, you can go and live at Occupy”, I was like “I live here” you know, and I think we'd probably just had a GA the night before, it was like what are we gonna do if the police come and stuff like that, so we was kind of aware that the police could turn up at any time and remove us, forcefully remove us or whatever, you know, so I was like, you know, there's no way I'm gonna go and live there when that means I'm homeless or whatever, I was like “I live here!”. So then, you know, it was not cool because then I had to go to Occupy and feel like people were looking at me like I was someone in need rather than someone who was there to help others, you know, so I didn't enjoy that but that's life, you get challenged in ways that you feel are slightly unbearable but you have to deal with it and you get over it and you're stronger. So that happened. And then, I think it was after about, nine, ten days, a week, from a week to like ten days and I got a text from my wife saying “look, do you wanna work this out or not? If so, come home now, and we'll work it out”.

I'd not been staying every night at Occupy, I'd stayed probably I'm not sure, five, six, seven times or something during, or, yeah, during that time. And.. or probably even four, and I made sure I stayed here as well, so that I was making it obvious that I live here. And then, yeah I got that text, and that was like sweet, sanity, you know, like, my wife's being what I would call real to me, you know like, family and all that stuff, yeah 'course, 'course I wanna, course I, you know is that what you're saying, do you wanna work it out, so I sent the text back saying “course I wanna work it through, you know, course I wanna, but”, you know and I think I probably said in the text, “BUT, you know what I'm about, you know what I'm about, so”, you know, or probably just said “course I wanna work through it, so I'll come and talk” you know, I can and I says “look you know what I'm about, you know what I care about”. It's not the first time that she found out what issues I care

about, you know what I mean? 'Coz I've painted pictures of starving people before, you know, I've painted quite large murals, and a mother, trying to breastfeed her starving child, so that's basically where my social concerns are at, you know what I mean, 'cause to me that's kind of like the worst of the worst, the fact that people can be starving in a world of plenty, you know, when it's all about miss-management of resources, you know, so I was about that before I ever met my wife, I was doing them paintings before I met her, so when I met her she learned what I was about and that, so we'd have these on-going issues when she's a bit more, you know, into her spirituality and not so much focussed, well not at all really, not at all focussed in the politics of society, you know what I mean? So yeah, that was a very significant part of my Occupy experience, yeah, yeah. And I used to bring my kids along and, you know. That side of it was important to me, you know, the kids, as well, you know, keeping it social, keeping it a place where it was enjoyable to be. Not just a, you know, hard hitting protest place, you know. Yeah.

Byron: Shall we perhaps finish on your song?

Popx: Yeah! Yeah let's do that.

I'll just need to...

[Fusses a bit with equipment]

So, ok.. ah, do I need to put this back on? I could do it, it's not a problem..

And then I'll just tune this...

[Tunes guitar]

So I'll just, coz it's not recording now aye, is it recording?

Byron: It's recording

Popx:

Ah ok... right, I'll just practice it slightly first then.

[Strums a little]

Yeah that's cool?

Byron: Yeah!

Popx: Yeah so about this song then, I started writing it at the campsites, and my initial inspiration was like "O for Occupy", so, like, I'm just wondering whether to say this because it's a bit geeky, but, like in the movie 'V', where they went round spraying a V on things, and like in the Warriors, where the guy was doing a W, it's like O – perfect, full circle, everything, proper powerful beautiful O. So I was like yeah O for Occupy, you know, we could just be doing O's everywhere, that's all we need to do, put an O up and people know it's like, yeah it's Occupy you know? So I was like, I was like inspired by that so I was like, O for Occupy, and I was writing like a rhyme, and I thought "yeah this could be a song one day" and it turned into a song, and I know that on day 50 I was working on this song, I remember that might've been the day I started actually penning it on paper, but I think I was writing it in my mind before then, and... so this is how it turned out

anyway.

Thank you for occupying Wall Street, pure sweetness to the taste for one such as me. I love the way you occupied Zucotti Park, during daylight and after dark, to me it made your point so eloquently.

I don't recall the very first time we kind of met, 'course it would've been via the internet, 'cause the mainstream media were just not ready yet. And yet from a simple ad in Adbusters magazine you set a date, September 17, "Occupy Wall Street, bring a tent".

Your spark lit a fire that spread quickly round the world, an international flag unfurled, Occupy, we are the 99%, we are unstoppable, another world is possible, corporate media claim both you and they did not understand why you were there, hah, another world is not only possible, she's on her way and on a quiet day if you listen very carefully you will surely hear her breathe.

Oh yeah, alright. Now I'm a believer, Occupy, thank you Occupy, for occupying my life. Occupy, thank you Occupy.

Thank you for occupying Wall Street, pure sweetness to the taste for one such as me. I love the way you set up kitchen on your service mission, with those donations from the wider love community. Oooh those very first vids are so... and then came more and more, and of course I love the way you help general assembly.

With your light you lit a lamp, from your protest, or what might be called a necessary process camp you opened up the floor and door for many more to stop the corporate greed and stop the war and start the peace and meet the genuine needs for sure.

Oh yeah, alright, ok. You may say I'm a dreamer, woah, Occupy, thank you Occupy for occupying my life. Occupy, thank you Occupy.

Oh yeah I thank you my friends for Occupying woah, and in-outside of your humble tents to me and of course a lot of other passionate people it made oh such much of a whole lot of sense.

One perfect small step, one giant leap toward addressing socio-economic violence perpetrated by a very very very small per-cent, but are any of us ever really innocent repent the end is nice, and be the change, yeah. Be the change you want to see in the world.

Be the change, yeah. Be the change you want to see in the world.

Be the change, yeah. Be the change you want to see in the world.

Repent, the end is nice, the beginning is nigh.

Oh Occupy, thank you Occupy for occupying my life.

Occupy, thank you Occupy.

Just when the Occupillar thought it's life was over, it turned into an Occufly.

Steffi Brightwell

Recorded Twenty-third April 2013

Byron: And I'll start by asking, how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Steffi: So a friend of mine came along to one of our community meetings that we have round here, and he said there's something happening called Occupy, we should check it out, and so a few of us went along, and checked it out, and yeah, that's how we first got involved.

Byron: So there was a community meeting that you had here in this area of town in Bryndwr?

Steffi: Yep, yeah. We had them every week at that time and just kinda, yeah.

Byron: So a few people who were involved in that were also involved in Occupy?

Steffi: Yes, yeah, to varying degrees, yep.

Byron: So was this sort of at the start that you got involved?

Steffi: I'm not entirely sure, I don't think it was quite at the start, but reasonably close to the start, yeah.

Byron: Ah ok. And did you camp there in Hagley Park?

Steffi: Ah, not me personally. I spent kind of only about two or three days actually there but a bit more time talking to people I knew, encouraging them to spend some time and check it out and yeah, maybe join in when they could.

Byron: Ah ok, and what was it that made you want to encourage people to check it out and spend time there?

Steffi: Well, I noticed that a lot of people had formed opinions without actually knowing much at all, and I thought that Occupy offered a few things that other places weren't necessarily doing, for example I thought it was a really visible alternative way of living and being a community that, like growing up in Christchurch my whole life didn't, you didn't often come across that. So I thought, yeah visible and accessible. So I wanted people to be able to see that for themselves.

Byron: What sort of alternative did you see Occupy as offering?

Steffi: So a couple of things I noticed from the time I was there was a different way of making decisions, so everyone getting a chance to speak and everyone being heard, and that also the similar way of people being able to be heard was not just in decisions but, you know, while they were just around the area as well, and I also felt like it was inclusive for the homeless people that I know in Christchurch, because a few of them came up to me and were trying to encourage me to come along, and I just thought man, they really feel like it's a place that they can be at home as well. So, maybe 'Place of Belonging' would be a good word.

Byron: Ok. So you, you'd had some involvement with the homeless in Christchurch before Occupy?

Steffi: A little bit. At the time, like during the time of Occupy I was involved in a course that was

hanging out with some people that are homeless, so it was quite on our minds then and there, and we just realized that it was a place they could, well not necessarily all of the homeless people, but the people we came into contact felt at home there.

Byron: And did you feel at home there in the short time you were there as well?

Steffi: Yeah I did, I felt like it was pretty easy to come in, have a chat to someone or join in with whatever the project was for the day. Yeah, people were friendly and looked after each other, which I thought was good.

Byron: So what sort of projects and things did you get involved with?

Steffi: Well I, as I said I wasn't really there myself very much, but I went on one or two of the protest marches, and kind of helped paint things for that and things like that. Yeah. That was about it.

Byron: So had you been involved in, sort of, activism before? Like going on protest marches or that sort of thing?

Steffi: Yes, but not really since I've- so I used to live up in Wellington, and it's kind of pretty easy to get connected into that stuff there, but not so much in Christchurch, a little bit, but not so much, yeah.

Byron: Do you think that that experience of being involved in Occupy has changed you at all?

Steffi: Umm.

Byron: Was it more a continuation of...

Steffi: [Chuckles] Yeah I think, yeah, it's both. I think it was, well, yeah, dunno, it's hard to see which things have changed you in which way, 'cause it's, I dunno, always been trying to change things... but I think that I changed my views when I realized that a lot more people around me care about some of the same things I care about, like yeah, just what's going on in the world, and yeah. Which I think, it's easy to feel like your isolated, and I thought, I don't know if that's necessarily change for me, but it's easy to feel like there isn't anyone else on the same page and so, kind of shift in thinking that there are people that I can connect with on this stuff. Yeah.

Byron: It's been a bit of a common theme with people, the way that Occupy created a space where sort of like-minded people all came together. Do you think it was quite important that there was a physical space for that rather than just something on the internet, that it was in a public park in the middle of the city, do you think that that was an important part of Occupy?

Steffi: Yeah definitely. I spent a bit of time thinking about this, I think that like, I dunno it's so much easier to be real with people when you're face to face, and I notice from being around in my own community, when you don't just see the well-constructed glamorous side of people but you see their kind of everyday trying to work things out. And in terms of being in Hagley park I really liked the, I don't know whether it was intentional or not, because I wasn't there for that, but the fact it was in a park just to the edge of where all the business things happen, because it was kind of like a location that shows, you know it's on the edge of how things are but shows how things could be, yeah.

Byron: Do you think that Occupy Christchurch was different in other cities because at the time it was happening Christchurch had just been through this big natural disaster?

Steffi: Yeah, I mean of course I didn't see what happened in other Occupies, but I think they each took on their own sort of flavour, but when I was, like one of the days I remember being at Occupy I realized that there was this lady that just wanted to talk about how much she'd been hurt by the way, like the way that the earthquake stuff had affected her and by the way that the organizations had not seen her necessarily as important, in her eyes, and yeah just realizing that this was the only space that she had to talk about that, aside from where she could try and fight for it, but where she could actually just say "you know, this sucks, and it's time we changed it". Yeah, so I think that it definitely did impact people that had that, you know, on their minds a bit more.

Byron: Do you think that an important aspect of it was that it wasn't just, it wasn't just the protests and protesting, it was also having that space just for those discussion and things as well?

Steffi: Yeah, yeah. I think there's a, there's definitely like a place for protests but I think the most exciting bit for me was seeing people gathering together and trying to discuss things and trying to work out what was the best way for our city to operate I guess, yeah.

Byron: Another thing that's came up is the idea that there are a whole number of competing sort of ideas at Occupy and, maybe competing ideologies and, did you find that in your experience?

Steffi: Yeah, I think you probably get that in most places, and I did wonder whether that made it hard for anything kinda, like, to be actioned out of Occupy. Yeah, so I think that I did find that in my brief experience.

Byron: So you would've participated in some of the general assemblies?

Steffi: Yeah, yeah I went to one or maybe two.

Byron: And that's where you sort of saw the method of sort of consensus decision making which was being used...

Steffi: Yeah! Yeah.

Byron: And you thought that was a good way of making decisions?

Steffi: Yeah, I think, so the night I went I sort of, it went pretty well aye. I think there's always a risk with that is that the loudest voice gets heard the most, but when it's facilitated well, then it's a pretty good way. It's a way for the quieter voices to get heard as well.

Byron: Had you seen that method of decision making used before in anything else you'd been involved in?

Steffi: Yeah, we try to do that, it looks different here, but we try to do that in our community here as well.

Byron: Do you think that anything in Christchurch has changed because of Occupy Christchurch?

Steffi: Good question. Do you mean like on a structural level or on an individual level or anything?

Byron: Well either, either.

Steffi: Yeah, I think the people that I know like, some of the people, I kind of know people from quite a wide range of ideas, or something, and the ones that kind of, would normally have been quite closed off to, I guess anything that's not the status quo, I think Occupy did, like for some of them it changed how they saw a lot of that, I dunno how to explain it properly, but... I think it opened their minds a bit to possibilities, and so I think that that's such a good thing, yeah.

Byron: Occupy of course was a global movement, did you feel that in Christchurch we were a part of a global movement connected to the other cities in New Zealand and around the world?

Steffi: Yeah so, I think yes... but I also liked that it kind of had its own expression and its own, it was grounded in what was happening here, rather than just being grounded in what was happening overseas. Yeah, I think that was so important.

Byron: If there were to be something like Occupy happen again, do you think you'd get involved again?

Steffi: I don't know. I think, so the reason I kind of didn't join in more than I did was because I felt like it took me away from my community where we were kind of trying to do similar things but in a different way, so I don't know if I'd personally get involved, but I think I'd encourage people that weren't connected into other things, or maybe one or two people from here to get involved as well. Yeah, so, I wouldn't be opposed to it, but I probably would, again, be more of an observing role. Networking together, something like that.

Byron: Did it, did the experience change at all the way that you were involved in your community, has it influenced that in any way or?

Steffi: I think that... it's kind of... I haven't thought about that question. Possibly? But I don't know, off the top of my head. Yeah.

Byron: How did you feel about the way that some of the media covered Occupy?

Steffi: I didn't really see that much of the media coverage. I got kind of second hand things from like, if I got to work, it'd be like "oh I read this today", so, I don't know too much of actually what was... what was kind of, yeah.

Byron: Do you think perhaps you, do you think your experience of Occupy was different because you're female than it would've been for the men involved?

Steffi: I guess that's kind of hard to answer, 'coz I'm not a man [laughs].

Byron: True, true.

Steffi: I dunno, I guess... could've been. I think there' are probably like, a lot of factors that would shape, you know, how I, my experience of Occupy.

Byron: 'Cause that is something some people have felt, sort of quite strongly about, is the... being a woman involved in Occupy they felt was different than being a man involved because possibly they felt more at risk and things like that, so...

Steffi: Right, sure, interesting, yeah. I guess, yeah, if I'd spent more time there I might've been more affected by that, but I think I felt fine when I was there, yeah.

Byron: So you found, in the time you were there you felt it was a safe space to be and things?

Steffi: Yeah totally, yeah. In fact I think, I felt like it made the park safer [chuckles].

Byron: Yeah. So, how did you feel about the fact that Occupy had the sort of drug and alcohol free policy and things that, was that part of that as well?

Steffi: Yeah I think that definitely helps, you know, you feel a bit safer. And just feeling like people are genuinely trying to look out for each other and so you've got twenty people looking out for you instead of walking down the road when there is no one [laughs].

Byron: Yeah, yeah. Are you still in touch with any people from Occupy?

Steffi: Yeah one or two. Yeah, we've got someone in our community now that's moved in since, and yeah.

Byron: And they're sort of involved in the community now in the way that you were, in the way that you've been since before Occupy?

Steffi: Ah yeah, and I don't know if it was, I don't there's interconnected joining there, but...

Byron: Ah that's good.

Steffi: It's pretty cool.

Byron: So the, the people that you encouraged to go along to Occupy, how did they feel about it, did they come along and think it was something for them, did it change how they felt about it or anything?

Steffi: Yeah, so some of them went along and some of them didn't, but I think that they, most of them were willing to hear me out, because a lot of the time they came from the idea of, you know, it's all just talking they're not really gonna achieve anything, and I was like, actually if you go there you'll see they've already achieved something, which was the thing that excited me the most, which was the, you know just modelling a different way of living. Yeah, which I think is the first step towards changing things in the world. Yeah, and so I think that ones that did check it out, they found that and the others were just like "aww yeah, you probably, might be right, I'll stop complaining".

Byron: Is there anything else you think that you learnt from your time at Occupy?

Steffi: I dunno... I'm not always so good at thinking on the spot [laughs].

Byron: That's alright. What are some of your best memories of things that were, that happened at Occupy while you were there?

Steffi: I guess, like, I just loved just kinda hanging out in the afternoon and just chatting to people and learning a bit about them and yeah, as I said before, hearing the lady just talk about what stuff is going on for her, and I think that particular day there was several people, one after the other got up and kinda talked, some people were saying, you know, things that frustrated them at the

moment and others were talking quite personally, and yeah I just sat there thinking “man, like, it's so good that people are listening and people are just trying to yeah, make a change”. I don't remember what your question was.

Byron: That's alright, yeah. Do you feel there was anything, anything negative about Occupy or perhaps anything that could've been done better?

Steffi: Well, I think, like, a negative thing I would see would be that I don't, I don't really see how it could like become a longer-term sustainable thing. I guess I can see how it could feed into those, so maybe that's not the goal, I don't know, but I think it's quite hard to, I know it's quite hard to join in on something if you're kind of like, will this last or will it not? You kind of want to feel like it will, and... I think I had another thing, what was it... maybe it'll come back to me... oh yeah, that's right. I think, like, I don't know how accessible, it was pretty accessible, it was right there in front of people, but it was for people who maybe, like it was very, like it was a good tool for gathering people who were already kind of on the same page, but I don't know how, or could be kind of moved along to that page, umm, but I don't know how accessible it was to people that just come from quite a different world, world view. I think that they might just have watched it and seen “whaaaat... it's just a bunch of people...” and not, yeah, but I don't know how you do engage people from that point thought. That's a bit harder.

Byron: Do you think the way the sort of the wider, I guess the wider Christchurch community, do you think that they were mostly supportive of Occupy or mostly negative about it or mostly just sort of ambivalent, not really having an opinion, did you get any idea of what that was?

Steffi: Well, I mean I can't really speak on all of Christchurch, but from, I guess from the people I know, I felt like there was quite a mixture, but definitely everyone was talking about it. It's hard not to when you see kind of all these tents and you're driving through town or, yeah. So everyone kind of had an opinion, and I'd say mixed opinions between people, usually the people that had actually checked it out seemed pretty positive, or the ones that joined in, from the people I know at least, but, mixture from others, yeah.

Byron: Do you have any further thoughts about, about Occupy or about the experience there, or anything sort of related to it?

Steffi: Yeah, like, now that I'm thinking about it, I'd be real interested to see, like I know that, of the people I know that kind of spent a bit more time at Occupy, that a lot of them are or already involved in a lot of stuff around social change and it'd be real interesting to see if people who, that was kind of a new thing for them, if they were, if they kind of stuck with that, and just kind of see where people are at a little bit down the track. Yeah, I'd be real interested in that, yeah. I guess that this project might bring some of that out of the woodwork [chuckles].

Byron: Hopefully, yeah!

Steffi: I think it was a valuable piece of the puzzle, Occupy.

Byron: Excellent, well thank you for your time, and thank you for being involved in the project.

Steffi: Cool, sweet.

Regan Stokes

Recorded Twenty-fourth April 2013

Byron: OK, and we'll start by asking how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Regan: I think it started because I had read articles online about Occupy Wall Street, and I thought "this is a really great thing, it's awesome that people are standing up for this cause", and then a week or a few days later I remember seeing suddenly this Occupy Christchurch group had popped up on Facebook, which was really really cool to see that it had kind of moved all the way from North America to Aotearoa, so I joined the group and quickly became involved in the organisation process.

Byron: So that was what, quite early on that you joined?

Regan: I think so. Definitely a few weeks before the original October 15th march, so it would've been possibly around late September, I assume, that I heard about the, that I got involved, yeah.

Byron: So did you attend some of the organising meetings that took place before that initial march?

Regan: Yes I think there was at least two... from memory the first one was outside the Christchurch Public Art gallery, it was a really rainy day and there was nowhere to kind of stay dry, so I remember we went into a tent that had been used by construction workers that was unoccupied at the time, so I guess our first Occupy meeting involved occupying

Byron: In being in a tent.

Regan: Yeah, a tent of a different kind, which was kind of nice.

Byron: So what sort of stuff was discussed at those initial meetings?

Regan: A lot of it was logistical, so where we were going to set up and occupy. There were, I think two main recommendations, both were in Hagley Park I think, one was possibly along Rolleston Ave, near the museum... from memory, I might be wrong, and the other one was on the corner of South Hagley park opposite the hospital, and part of the reason that was decided was because the temporary bus exchange was along Hagley Ave, so we knew that there'd be quite a lot of foot traffic and people around there. As well as that, I was involved in the Occupy New Zealand page, and we wrote a kind of initial statement of purpose collaboratively over the internet where people would suggest what our, what statement should represent Occupy to begin with, and I would write it up, and then there was about, we had 30 or 50 people who would offer suggestions as to how it would be tweaked, so, in time for their first meeting, I brought along kind of our, the completed statement of purpose which had been written collaboratively by a group of people and agreed upon by that group of people to represent the Occupy movements of Aotearoa, which was really cool.

Byron: So what then happened on October 15th when the occupation began?

Regan: I remember going along, I can't remember what time it started, but there was already quite a few people there, just started by setting up areas to paint signs and things like that, and then before long there was kind of a talk, a few speeches, I stood up and read out the statement of purpose again, and then we kind of had an open floor discussion where anyone could kind of stand up and say whatever they wanted, and following that we marched down Riccarton road, all the way to the small reserve or park, almost as far up as Ilam road, which is quite a distance; it's at least a

kilometre I'd say, maybe a kilometre and a half from Hagley Park, and then we walked back and there was music and a few bands played. There was communal fish and chips which was nice, and I remember One News reported that there were 30 people on the march, and I remember one of the first videos that we put on the Occupy Christchurch YouTube page was footage of the march that showed that it was closer to 300 than it was to 30, I'm not sure if that's just bad journalism or if it was purposely misreported, but certainly an interesting note there.

Byron: So after that march, that's when the decision was made to Occupy that space, to camp there?

Regan: Yeah, I know that there wasn't any fixed decision beforehand, I don't think, to occupy the space. We knew that we were going to have an open floor discussion and march and then, from what I remember from those initial meetings I think the general consensus was that we would come back, kind of see what the, what the conditions were, whether there was any police presence or not, and then decide from there whether we were going to actually set up tents and camp there for the night, because I know lots of people obviously have family, work commitments and if it was going to be an issue where it was going to lead to arrest or anything like that then a lot of people weren't, obviously weren't, and rightly so, prepared to go that far. So we, once we got back we had dinner, we had a kai which was great, and then there was a small group of us left on that night... I remember, I think, going to, going to a party with a friend, I left Occupy for a little bit, went to a party, picked up my tent, came back and there was probably about, maybe 15 to 20 of us that night, and we just kind of stayed up for most of the night sitting and talking, there was just a really positive feeling going around, like, none of us had expected to be there that late, to have even put a single tent up but here we were sitting in the middle of this public park, yeah it was brilliant, that feeling on the first night, it was really I guess this feeling that we could achieve anything, 'cause none of us had ever expected to get to that state.

Byron: So what was being discussed in these sort of, late-night discussions on the first night of Occupy?

Regan: I guess there were a lot of discussions about obviously the issues that Occupy dealt with, well not dealt with but at least tried to address inequality, environmentalism, global finances, things like that. So we had, I guess there was a lot of philosophical discussion around these things and how we could start to put them right. I think someone had a USB stick with internet on it, so on someone's laptop we watched footage from demonstrations in Auckland, Dunedin, Wellington, Invercargill, Timaru even, so that was really, really great to see that that was...

Byron: See that that was happening all over the country?

Regan: Yeah, yeah to see that other people were experiencing what we were as well, even though we were just you know, 15 people huddled under blankets sitting in Hagley Park, we weren't actually alone. Discussions of what we were going to do from there, how we were going to keep the flow moving, I guess logistical discussions like where we should, if we should move our tents in the morning, what we should do if we were met with police presence or anything like that, yeah I remember that first night we pretty much stayed up almost the whole night, I'd say. Yeah it was brilliant, I just remember someone having donated or given these coloured light bulbs, so they were just light bulbs with painted red and blue and yellow and things, and they were just kind of dangled around this central tent where, or, a central marquee where we were all sitting and, yeah it

just looked awesome.

Byron: What happened after that then? I mean the Occupation starts with this march, and people decide to camp, what happens on the next day?

Regan: The next day... I think everyone was quite tired, but still kind of that feeling of achievement went through to the next day which was really great. A lot of people who had not stayed the night and gone home to their Whānau or flats or whatever returned the next day so that was nice to see the next day, people coming back... I think we, yeah started setting up like a provisional kind of food tent, started getting together supplies... I mean while I've got a fairly good memory of that first night I can't remember the exact details of the second day and so on but yeah I think we mainly just moved our tents round, started to gather our resources, think about how we were going to address the more practical concerns like how we were going to feed, feed one another and stay safe and how we were going to organize things like security during the night and things like that, yeah. Yeah it was very good. Actually on that first night, come to think of it, we'd have, I remember a general assembly after dinner, which was really cool. We had about 30 people on that first night just kind of discussing where to go from there, which certainly helped our organization on the second day, I think there were also some poetry readings on that first night, which was really nice as well.

Byron: So the general assemblies started right from that first day. And these were daily at the beginning of Occupy?

Regan: Yes. I think. Certainly within the first few weeks, even the first month it could be said, we had general assembly or meeting every day at, I can't remember the exact time, it was either 7 or 8 o'clock, where we would all kind of get in a circle and have a fairly cons- well, yeah a fairly constructive discussion about ways forward and how to proceed and so on. So there were rules with that, like if you wanted to talk you put your hand up, there was a facilitator who would kind of direct discussion, we'd usually have some sort of agenda in the first few weeks we'd have action groups like Logistics, and Action and things like that, so that people could split off into their different subcommittees and organise different things.

Byron: And these general assemblies used a process of consensus decision making?

Regan: Yes, so similar to general assemblies in other parts of the world, you would put both of your hands up to agree with someone while they were talking, put hands down, I think, to kind of disagree and kind of cross your arms in front of your body to show that you were kind of like vehemently opposed to something, so if there was ever any decision that had to be made, it would be put to the group, so then people would, you know, put their hands up or down or so on to show whether they agreed with a motion being passed, and it wasn't unless there was a vast majority that it was passed. Yeah, which I think was a good way to do it. It certainly took longer and wasn't as efficient as say delegating someone as a leader to make decisions in a certain area, but I think that it was good because it fit with the philosophy of Occupy that there should not be any leaders, and that overall, the group should have the stay, if you're a part of it you should be part of every decision that's made.

Byron: So what sort of things were these subcommittees doing?

Regan: I remember at the start we has about six sub-groups or subcommittees or whatever you

want to call it, and they were around, there was like a Media subcommittee for posting videos on the YouTube group, keeping the website updated, doing things like that, that's what I know most about because that's what I was the most involved in, so I did most of the photography and filming for a lot of the events, and put them on YouTube, and I was, I think I did most of the website work, at least at the start, but there was also a logistics group which kind of dictated the day-to-day running of the camp... how we were going to get food, how we were going to deal with rubbish, how we were going to deal with toileting and so on. I think there was an action group which planned marches and demonstrations... I'm trying to think of what other groups there were. There was at least six, I've got an image of this like clothesline with all of the big pieces of... we had kind of boards of plastic, one for each group that kind of told each group what was about, but I can't remember all of the names of them now, but definitely at least six. I can remember three, so we're half way there [laughs].

Byron: So you were involved in the media group... what did you see the role of this particular... or that there was so much new sort of social media involved with YouTube and Facebook, what was the role of all, all of that in the movement?

Regan: I think from the start, since Occupy was running against the current system it couldn't be relied on, well we couldn't rely on the current media, mainstream media system to portray us in a good light, I mean I think it would be a bit naive to expect that mainstream news outlets would paint us in a good light when we were criticizing the very world that they come from, so it was very important, I believe the whole time, to put out our own voice out into the world, and with the rise of social media and so on that's a lot more possible. So it was effectively putting our, keeping the Facebook page updated, letting people know what we were up to, doing things like I would edit videos that have happened from marches and so on and put them on YouTube, I wrote quite a few press releases for upcoming actions like I remember we did a demonstration in front of a butchery because they were receiving meat from a company that was actually locking out its workers up north because they refused to accept salary cuts. So whenever you organize a march like that you need to write a press release so that it can be sent out to news outlets and kind of put on the website and so on so that people know the concise details of what's happening... yeah just giving a balance of our voice against the voice of the mainstream media which were never huge fans of us, you could say.

Byron: What did you think of the coverage of Occupy that appeared in sort of *The Press* and *The Mail* and maybe a few other outlets at the time?

Regan: Pretty expected, usually just labelled us as hippies with no jobs and things. I remember often if occasionally we'd get people driving past the park and yelling out things like "get a job" to which I would reply "I have three", which I think I, yeah, I think I had three jobs at that time, also had my final year university exams around the time that Occupy started so it was certainly a bit of a juggling act, but yeah, it's very easy to resort to stereotypes if you're... if you're covering something, and certainly a lot of people read the news to kind of buy into those sort of stereotypes and get that, you know, surface reading pleasure or whatever you want to call it, so it's certainly understandable that we were painted that way. I remember on one occasion we had this reporter from a newspaper, I think *The Mail*, or *The Southland Times*, or some fairly fringe newspaper and we thought "ah ok, he seems to, you know what he's talking to us he's getting a proper interview

and so on, sounds like we might get a semi-decent story” and then when we saw the story we had to laugh because we were back to the old ah “hippies, no jobs, they’re not really sure what they’re protesting about” and then the odd quote that’s put in there completely out of context that makes everyone look foolish, so yeah I think we certainly didn’t get great coverage, but we didn’t expect great coverage, and the fact that we got some coverage could be, could be seen as a positive thing. It all depends on the viewer, the receiver of that coverage, whether they are I guess an active or passive news recipient, you know, whether they’ll watch a news story with a critical, through a critical lense or whether they’ll watch it and not question anything and just kind of ride along that stereotype but Occupy was all about education and awareness so it could be argued that any coverage that we got was good, depending upon the viewer.

Byron: True. And of course I remember one sort of media related activity was when we sort of took over a talkback program.

Regan: Yeah that was great, that was such a good night.

Byron: Yeah so, what happened with that?

Regan: It was just a really exciting night, because, I think it was the night that we received the bike [generator], so we had one guy, I can’t remember his name, but he was, he was brilliant, he brought along this bike on a wooden stand, he’d taken the front wheel off and connected it to a washing machine motor so that when you pedalled the bike a light at the front lit up, so it generated power, and we knew that we could later use that to charge car batteries and things, ‘cause that was how we were using power, we had solar generators which would charge the car batteries but they would take a very long time, so the fact that we had this bike was great. So he just came and dropped that off, and we were all kind of really really happy about that, so we were all kind of hopping on the bike and seeing how it worked and so on, and then suddenly, I think you... Byron, I don’t think you were at the camp at the time...

Byron: Not at that point.

Regan: But you texted myself or someone else or a group of us and said “Occupy’s on talkback radio” I think it was *NewsTalk ZB...*

Byron: *NewsTalk ZB.*

Regan: Which is I think traditionally more of a right-wing show, which is always interesting to listen to, so we had a radio there and we turned it on, and yeah they were talking about Occupy, and callers were calling up, and we listened to a few of them and, there was that kind of classic like “they’re just homeless hippies living in a park, ruining the grass” type thing, and then there was a few positive contributions which was, from the general public, they were, you know saying things like “You know I think it’s good that they’re still standing for something and you know maybe they’ve got a point, maybe this financial system that we live under does deserve some scrutiny, and I don’t think we should evict them because that’s what New Zealand should be about, the right to proclaim any political message” and then a lot of people at the camp then called up the talkback show and so we had kind of a string of maybe four or five of us in a row, giving obviously positive messages about Occupy and I think it was a bit overwhelming for the host [laughs]. Certainly some of his responses were quite, not so enthusiastic, but I had my camera there, so I was kind of sprinting around wildly, because people when they were on hold they’d

walk to different parts of the park, so I was kind of sprinting round wildly recording people as they were talking and then going back to the, back to the radio to hear the responses and so on, and it was a great video, I can't remember if it ever made it to YouTube...

Byron: It's on YouTube, I've put one up on YouTube, yeah.

Regan: Excellent! So it is on YouTube, that's good.

Byron: Yeah.

Regan: Yeah it was certainly a, yeah it was a night of... wild, wild hope, I guess you could say. It was kind of nice putting out, being able to hear our voices on the radio and getting kind of a true representation of ourselves rather than hearing a lot of very negative comments from the general public, and of course they're allowed to make those comments, that's fine, they have a right to speak their view just as anyone does, but I think with Occupy there was certainly a lot of misinformation, that if you're only, if your view of Occupy is just seeing it on the news or driving past Hagley park and seeing a few tents there without actually coming in to see what it's actually about then it's very easy to get a negative view of it, so it was nice to get that flip-side that night.

Byron: Yeah. So, what were the sort of, the demographics like at Occupy. I mean that, the whole idea of hippies in a park without a job, I mean was that at all accurate, or was this mostly people who did have jobs or mostly students or, what was the makeup of Occupy?

Regan: I think the general stereotype of hippies in a park was generally very inaccurate. There was a huge demographic of people at Occupy obviously. I mean back then I was a student, I was in my third year of University, I worked as... what did I work as? Yeah I had a job as a social worker, and I think I also had a job... social worker, youth worker, and maths tutor as well at that time. There were a lot of other students involved, the "young idealists" if you want to call it, which is certainly a good thing, don't get squashed by pragmatism... So yeah there was a lot of students, a lot of, I guess middle-aged people who had been involved in protests before but certainly weren't unemployed or anything, had secure jobs and came along because they believed in it, a lot of middle-aged professionals, computer programmers, builders, that sort of thing. There were there was a wide variety of ethnicities at Occupy, a huge amount of cultures there, and I think looking back on it, it was kind of amazing how well that was accommodated, like I don't think there were any major kind of issues over that, which is really positive, and I think the fact that certainly the vast majority of people who came to Occupy came with an open mind and came to accept new ideas certainly helped with that. There were young people, there were kids as young as kind of one and two there which was really nice, especially in those first few weeks, the fact that people felt safe bringing their Whānau in and Tamariki to Occupy was really nice, there were older people there, so those who had not necessarily been in a protest before but identified with the message, there were, especially towards the end of the movement there were certainly I guess a group of homeless people there, which I mean I personally have absolutely no problem with, I think that the fact that the moment you label someone as homeless then you start going down a slippery slope of denigration, so I think the fact that homeless people saw it as a safe place to be was actually very positive, especially in a city that had just had earthquakes that had, it was very unsafe for a lot of people. So I guess there, there certainly was an element of homeless people there, but it certainly wasn't the main makeup of it, especially at the start, and I think the fact that towards the end, as the more, I guess, politically minded people began to get burnt out from the

amount of work or pressure or whatever, as they started to move away and it did become more slanted towards the homeless demographic I thought that was actually quite a nice way for it to continue in that it gave them a sense of community and, you know, when you're homeless in a city and you feel like you've got no one to turn to the, the one thing that a lot of people need is just somewhere to go where they can know that they can sit down have a bit of a rest, put their gear down knowing that no-one's gonna steal it, have a drink, have a cup of tea, have some kai and then move on if they wish, or stay the night if they wish, I thought that was a really nice, nice service that it gave to the community. Whether it was interpreted as that by others, I don't think it was, but that's how I see it. Certainly, especially in that first month, you had a huge, huge demographic. There was... you know there were almost, just as many different demographics as there were people, I feel it was that wide, that was one of the really nice things about it.

Byron: And a number of people travelling ,, from other parts of the country or from overseas would show up at Occupy as well.

Regan: Yes yes, and that's actually the one group that I forgot to mention. Tourists were very common at Occupy, and we had a large number of amazing tourists that came in, stayed with us, I remember, I think his name was Mattie, from the Czech Republic, stayed for approximately almost a month or so, and he set up a vegetable garden, he tended to it every day and he was a brilliant cook and he helped organize everyone and he was incredible. Jo, as well, from England was brilliant, she was kind of just an amazing source of positivity within the camp, and there was a constantly revolving set of people, tourists that either came because they identified with the cause and they'd come from Wellington and had stayed with the camp there, or just people who had nowhere to stay and wanted somewhere to lay their head for the night. I don't think that's an... I didn't see it as an issue if, whatever reason people came there for, it gave people shelter, it gave people a community, and whether you could say that that's, you know, matching the political aims of Occupy or not, I think in some small way it was, because it's providing a home for people, it's providing a centre of discussion, it's breaking down those fences that we place in between ourselves in our regular neighbourhoods that divide ourselves from our neighbours, that prevent us from becoming a collective entity, and it's building a community, so I thought it would be nicer, for a lot of people it was very approachable, and accommodating, yeah. We always had our kind of communal tent where anyone could stay, we had, I think, a male and female tent later on as we got bigger as well, so that was really nice.

Byron: Do you think that Occupy Christchurch was in a bit of a different position from Occupy protests elsewhere because the city was in this sort of post-disaster state at that point in time? How did that effect Occupy?

Regan: I think we certainly, given the state of the city, the state of the red zone, the state of houses out in the east, we certainly had a lot more to protest about, and I think that as a result, a lot of the messages that, you know, could be read on cards and signs as we did marches and things were extremely varied, you know they could range from the global economic system right through to CERA not giving people a fair deal with their houses after the earthquake, and that was one of the criticisms that Occupy got, that there wasn't one precise aim, or precise message, but I think if you're giving people an outlet to voice a criticism of the system under which we live, then you can't just suddenly say "ok, we're doing this message, this is what you have to write on your sign,

we're not going to talk about the earthquake, we're not going to talk about, you know, issues for our own country, we're going to talk about the global economic system", then that's gonna dissuade just as many people as it was originally bringing in, so yes it's gonna seem wide, and yes it was even wider in Christchurch because of the earthquakes, but I think certainly Occupy addressed this huge need for a voice of the people, I remember once we had kinda of an open discussion outside the arts centre, and people got up and took the mic and were almost in tears saying the trials that they'd gone through since the earthquake, and finding that there really was no way for them to express their anguish, and Occupy gave them that option. I mean even if it was simply voicing your problems in front of a group of 100 people listening, then that's certainly better than nothing, yeah.

Byron: So something that people have talked about a little in these interviews is the sort of contesting ideas, or ideologies that were present at Occupy. Did you find that Occupy became sort of a, like a forum with contesting ideas?

Regan: To a degree, I guess. But everyone is going to bring to the table their own past experiences and their own beliefs and their own philosophy on the world, and while most of it was compatible with everyone else's there, there was certainly, I guess some instances where there were different views of same things, for example some people might come in and be more pushing for a kind of more violent response, or a violent style of protest, but we were always very fixated on the idea of non-violence, and kind of protesting through example, rather than setting up barriers and getting us all arrested. What Occupy was about was just providing, providing people, you know people being the general public or those involved, or whoever, with the knowledge that things don't have to be the way that they are, or I think, a lot of people see this current kind of modern world that we live in, and see it as the way that it's always been, as yeah kind of immovable because of that.

And there's a, I remember a word that I heard at university, that kind of sums it up it's called hegemony, I'm not sure if that's how to pronounce it but, it's this kind of idea that the world that we live in is fixed and it's immovable and that we can't change anything because the systems that are in place are immovable and have been in there for generations and that's what Occupy was setting about to shake. So whether it's people living in the camp and thinking "hey, it is possible to live communally here, we've got thirty people from wildly different backgrounds that can sit down and have a kai and discuss personal things about their lives or the state of the world" or whatever, and sit down and make a decision each night, I think it certainly profoundly impacted everyone who lived there, myself included, just in terms of learning how to deal with one another, learning how the human interaction works, learning that there is, there are other alternative ways to live, and even if that's just for the general public, driving past on a Sunday morning and seeing a group of tents in the middle of a park and thinking "hey that's strange"... it just starts to set in motion that thought that, hey, maybe the way that society is organized isn't the way that it has to be, because the way that it is organised now certainly puts very few at an advantage at the expense of the many.

I mean whether you talk about first world, the first world developed countries that produce our goods, that are paid absolutely nothing to produce the shoes that we buy at K-mart for seven dollars, or whether we talk about in our own country. One of the statistics that we included in the Statement of Purpose was "one in four kids in New Zealand live in poverty". Well you can see

there's growth [of] inequality in just in our country, let alone the whole world, and if you start to shake that ideal that this is the way that it has to be done, that we have to buy food from the supermarket and we have to buy clothes from, brand new from a shop, because there's no other way, because it's convenient, then you start to shake the main ideologies that hold up this system of capitalism and you start to bring about that dialogue of how things can be changed, because it does need to change.

It's not like capitalism benefits the planet that we live on, you know, with the amount of resources that we use to produce the things that we don't really need through the fact that we're in this consumer culture that actively encourages us to throw out our goods so that we can buy more. You know, I remember once that I was in a tutorial at University, and my tutor asked this one question, that kind of gave me this epiphany, she said "If we stopped producing clothes in the world right now, so no more clothes were made, could we clothe the entire world?", if we had, you know, given the right resources and it made me think, you know, well the answer is yes! Why are we still making clothes? There's plenty of clothes. Any given- take a random person from our country, from America, from any developed nation and you can probably make several wardrobes out of it, and it's just that we're living in excess and it's having an effect on people, it's having an effect on animals, it's having an effect on the planet, and I mean, you hear a lot of people, you know, doing the write-up of "Occupy, what did it achieve" and so on, and saying, you know "Occupy did nothing", it was, you know a blip of the international radar, it was there for a few months and now it's gone, it's not like they changed the world or anything" well, it was never going to change the world, because the world is very ingrained in its ways, and it was, I mean while we were camping there, we were never under any impression that us, that a group of thirty people camping in the park was suddenly going to change the very system under which we live, we didn't expect that because that would be very naive to expect that.

All that we expected was that more people would engage in a discussion about the problems that we face, and I think that's what it did achieve, and that's why, I guess I'm proud of the Occupy movement and I'm proud of my involvement in it, because it did start to ask those niggling questions, which up until a few years ago were never spoken, you know, what, at least on the mainstream level, like I can remember, soon after Occupy the word capitalism has just started cropping up a bit in the U.S. media, it was like "ooh", this item was suddenly almost on the agenda, we're actually starting to look at the system under which we live in, that never really happened before. That's what needs to happen. Yeah, so I think, it definitely achieved what I wanted it to achieve. In the eyes of the mainstream media, I mean they're never going to report that it achieved anything, because the mainstream media is held up by the corporate industries that we're rallying against. But at the end of the day it, this whole system, it benefits few at the expense of many. And while I think that the whole tagline of "we are the 99%" has turned into a bit of a kind of cheesy gimmick, at its root it strikes a, strikes the right chords I guess. Not just the fact that 1% of the world controls what, 40% of its wealth or whatever the proper figure is, but just the fact that a small group of people born into privilege, and that's you know you and me included, those of us who were lucky enough to be born in a first world country in a family that has food and shelter and love, the fact that we kind of take this privilege and run with it, and are able to buy, you know whether it's oranges that come from the U.S.A., or whatever, or clothes that have been made by child slaves in a country millions, well, thousands of miles away, it's just

trying to wake people up to thinking consciously about their actions, because, so until we all kind of get together and realize the damage that it's causing, that anything's gonna really change.

But it's going to be OK! Yep. I feel like things will get better.

Byron: Do you think if something like Occupy were to happen again that you'd get involved again?

Regan: I'd certainly get involved, I don't know whether I'd- I probably wouldn't be able to get involved as much as I did last time, and that's just because I now have a full time job, and I have other commitments, which I obviously have to tend to. The one thing that struck me while I was living at Occupy, and I lived there for about two months I think, was that, I mean especially at the start of Occupy we found that there weren't enough people there during the day, because you know people would come there in the late afternoon or evening, and then stay there during the night, and then go off to work during the day, and we were finding that there were kind of three or four people around during the day, we were struggling to find, ironically, people without jobs that could come and stay at Occupy to hold camp, but the one thing that I kept thinking about was, and even more so now, is that the system gives us these lives, these jobs that means, that prevent us from fighting the system, like, so many people there wanted to be there longer, but couldn't because you know, they had a family, and if you've got a family then you need to get money and if you need to get money then you need to have a job so you can feed your family, and that prevented a lot of people from being as involved in Occupy as they wish. Yeah, it's the cyclic nature of the beast that we face. You know, if everyone wasn't working extremely long hours and getting extremely tired and getting home from work and wanting nothing more than to sleep, then we'd probably be able to organise a lot better, but that's not the case. So yes I'd definitely get involved, I still believe in the cause, I still do everything I can to live along the principles that I have learned through Occupy, but yeah now that I have a, now that I have a full time job, it becomes a lot harder to find the time.

Byron: Is there anything you think that Occupy could've done differently or better as a movement?

Regan: This is a difficult question to answer, because am I meant to answer in terms of the movement, in terms of the whole global movement or in terms of the American movement or the movement or in Aotearoa, or our movement in Otago, or...?

Byron: Well, any or all of the above I guess.

Regan: I think, possibly, it needed to be a bit more adaptive, in that the holding space in public parks certainly worked for a period of time, but it was clear that it was not going to be a long-term model, but I think it's a catch twenty two, like all of Occupy's strengths are also its weaknesses. The fact that it employed a robust decision making process of full participatory democracy where everyone could have a say and before any decision was made all the relevant parties that wanted to speak on it could do so, and those who opposed it could speak and so on, and then there was a vote and it was only a, if it was you know a vast majority of people that agreed to it, you know 80 or 90%, that meant that decisions were slow. And that meant that it was less adaptable than would have perhaps been ideal. But that was also the positive side of Occupy. A lot of people hadn't been involved in politics before. A lot of people thought and still think that politics is just reserved for those that sit up in the beehive and dictate what happens to our country. But Occupy gave people a

chance to be a part of that, and gave people some ownership of the political system in their own lives. So, for what it was, I think it did a pretty good job, and whether another movement comes where there is a clear leader or whatever, like Martin Luther King back in the 1960's, or anything like that that comes out of it, then I'm sure a lot of it can be traced back to ideas that, that Occupy started. But I think for what it was it certainly achieved a lot, but a lot which can't be measured by any way. You can't measure the amount of people that have begun to think differently as a result of the Occupy movement. You can't measure the amount of people that now don't take the mainstream media on face value. So the fact that it was very immeasurable made it very easy to criticise.

Byron: Do you have any further, any further thoughts or anything else that you would like to say about Occupy?

Regan: I remember, it was quite funny, back when we were actually holding space at Hagley Park, and a lot of the criticism that found its way towards us was kind of like "oh you're destroying the grass, you're destroying the grass". I remember one line I heard was "the grass will grow back after the revolution", which I thought was quite good. Yeah, I think people are very quick to jump to one side of the argument, a very opinionated side of the argument, you know they see people camping in a park and "ooh they're hippies they need to get out" and that sort of thing but... we're encouraged to be that way, because if we are divided and against each other, then no real progress happens. So I always just found it really funny that people were kind of upset about the grass, we actually took quite nice care of the grass, we had a mower, we mowed the grass, we moved the tents around every few days to not over-trample the grass... I think in the grand scheme of things the grass doesn't matter too much, when the ice-caps up in the arctic are currently melting.

Yeah, I think Occupy was really positive. The way that the world's getting, the issues that it brought up are going to become, kind of going to come more and more to the forefront of mainstream politics, I'm really glad I was involved in it. It gave me a lot to think about, and still does, and I made a lot of really strong connections and friendships through Occupy that I still maintain. When I think about Occupy now I often think that that was mainly what it achieved on a local level for Christchurch, it kind of put the people together with the ideas that otherwise may not have come together, so people from wildly different groups, wildly different demographics that otherwise may never have met but now there are networks in place as a result of it, so even though the camp is gone, the connections that it produced are still going to this day, which is really good. I encourage people to actively involved themselves in politics if they can. If they have the privilege and time to do so. Yeah, thank you, kia ora.

Nicholas Yates

Recorded Thirty-first April 2013

Byron: I'll start by asking the question, how did you become involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Nicholas: I first heard of it on the internet, Facebook of course, when suddenly, there was a lot of interest in what was happening in Wall Street. And I didn't really know what was going on at the time; I was actually on a recovery journey at that time. And then through that journey, actually, I ended up homeless, so I came to Occupy. I basically joined a page and I said I would come along, and found that it was about the 99%. I was interested in what it was about, but I also found that, it was a place for me to, basically, live for a while. So, I heard about it, through people obviously, through the internet, and I found out there's a bit of a revolution going on, in America. Which, it wasn't on television, which was fascinating to me. Because, I mean there were loads of people, when I talk about loads, I'm talking about filling up an entire bridge with people, gathering together and uniting. In America, even in Iceland apparently as well, was it Iceland? - I'm sure that was Occupy as well?

Byron: Related to it anyway. I don't think they called themselves Occupy, but there was definitely a big movement there, with the same concerns.

Nicholas: From what I've heard about it, I haven't looked into it too much, but I've heard they basically started it over, they kicked out the government and said "You guys are not really working, you're not doing what you need to do". And, basically, well, in Christchurch I found that - oh sorry, to answer your question - I heard about it, of everything, maybe around, before the 15th, anyway, of October [2011] and then I ended up living there around, I think, the 5th of November. So, anyway I heard about it on the internet and Facebook, and through keeping up with alternative news that was getting shared on Facebook so I joined up. And that's it really; I think that's it, yeah. Pretty much, I wanted to do that.

Byron: So, you got involved around the 5th of November? What did the camp look like at that point when you got involved, like how many people were there?

Nicholas: There were so many people. It was their first march that everyone had, I think it was the 15th of October, and I was quite out of balance at the time because I was going through the, this is quite personal actually, I was on medication and all that stuff, and I wasn't on it at the time. And I was trying to go without it and I was.... way out of balance, so I was swinging around and just doing what I wanted to do. And the amazing thing there was the acceptance of being able to just do something, I got up on the stage and played with the drums, and people were quite open and caring, they were just like "we know it" when it was probably in the face of the guy who was actually doing the music performance. But it was, yeah the 15th of November or October I hung out there for a while and got to meet people.

Byron: So, you got involved for a mixture of political, philosophical reasons supporting what it was about, but also for, sort of, practical reasons like needing somewhere to stay?

Nicholas: Yeah, there were a lot of people who were actually from or been through the mental health services and that interested me a lot. But, the only thing is, how can you fight against a

system when you're actually unwell? Y'know, it's quite contradictory and people aren't gonna take you seriously. And if you're not well, then it's quite annoying but I couldn't fight it anyway, at the time because I was so... in need at the time that I was around people who were really supportive, and really caring, and really holding me, in a way. I ended up doing a bit of help here and there, as a - what was the question again?

Byron: It's just about why you got involved.

Nicholas: Cool. I didn't have a place to stay, ultimately. I was actually in the mental health service, what do you call it, the Princess Margaret Hospital, and there were some really good people there but I had a meeting there that went from a goal to leave by the 5th of November, so suddenly, that's when you're leaving, to when you're going, you've got to get out by this time. What I did was, I was struggling to get support, so I pushed people away most of the time, so in a way it did teach me one thing but what ended up happening was I stayed there, and I tried 'till the 5th of November, I really tried to get a place after that. So, I tried to pull all the strings and all the services, and they weren't gonna help me. So, I was forced onto the street. And basically, I was trying to understand what was happening to me and my body, and people seem to have some understanding in Occupy and to me, I viewed it as sort of, well now I view it as, kind of hippies of the new century. Y'know, like that whole other world, that whole, incredible world full of knowledge and unfortunately, I couldn't really indulge in it as much as I wanted to. But, anyway, that's how I ended up at Occupy, 'cause basically, I was removed from where I was staying and I needed to find a place after that. And there was the night shelter as well, which was supportive of people. However, eventually, they ended up, I don't know what happened exactly straight away in Occupy but I do feel like, my presence there, even though I was supported and I did go to the odd protest, the need that I had, I felt that couldn't be held by all of the people that were there. I felt that my energy didn't contribute to the best of Occupy at the time, and I felt that some of the things that happened there, unfortunately, some of the really dark things that seemed to happen there - my contribution was that I didn't help out, so did I contribute to the system? I mean, that's what felt quite ... it felt quite low, I guess. But, sorry, I kind of went off on a tangent there.

Byron: It's alright. So, you felt like within Occupy, you found a really supportive group of people, but at the same time you felt concerned that maybe what you were putting in wasn't as much as you would've liked to have put in?

Nicholas: That's right, I was supported, I mean, I had people who really did care, and then because I was so ... the part of me that was looking for the care, self-care and stuff, was just really difficult to not get involved with bringing my stuff into it. I still feel quite out of balance at the moment, quite... I'm not quite sure how much of a use I'm gonna be for this, even now I feel as if I can't really contribute, but I want to. I did try, but it didn't feel as if it were enough. But, I did wonder, there was quite a bit of corrupt stuff going on in Occupy, that it seemed to be going on, such as the industries and realising that New Zealand seemed to be just like America, y'know with the corporations and everything. That woke me up to corporations. I was aware of corporations before, but I didn't realise that corporations were sorta the new...

Byron: Held the power in society?

Nicholas: Yeah, well they think they held the power. I've been listening to another speaker that says "they don't have the power, they have our power, we give it to them". Y'know, and why do we do that? Why the frick to we give it to them?

Especially people we don't even know, why would anyone?? I mean, people eat fruit from places they don't even know. Why would you buy tomatoes from China? Why would you take medication that's from another place, that you don't know who's making them, you don't know what's in it, and you don't know what it does to you? It can have a very, very heavy price paid by taking it. I can't believe that I go off my medication, and I can't seem to live without it. Why is that? Because before, I was always able to do things without it. But, I didn't really want to make this about my medication or me so, Occupy is, I think, a combination of the inevitable "Wake Up" that people have. And I'm quite surprised as to how well it did, and I wonder, how in hell did the world do that? But, how did they do that? Because if it were under that much control, why weren't they stopped? Somehow, it just exploded. How did it explode on Wall Street?

One person stayed there, and one person in a magazine wrote something and then the whole world eventually caught on. There was a revolution, but nothing like this before, is there? It's just incredible. I wanted to be a part of it, in a way, and that's how I stayed there for a while and off medication and homeless, Occupy held me and took care of me and I learnt to take it easy, I guess, and really be in the support of other people and I found it really intense. And the amount of people I met, it was just incredible. I suspect that it was a bit crazy, because obviously, it's difficult coming from someone who's been in an unwell state, but there were people there who I met that really consumed me and I wonder where they came from. There was one instance where there were black vehicles, a black vehicle, and it seemed to me, at the time, that there was a siren inside.

Byron: Could have been.

Nicholas: It could have been! And that was incredible to me, if that was real, that was obviously gotta be some kind of intelligence agency, y'know. I wonder, why would they do that? If they really were, that wouldn't be very intelligent, would it? Because, they were in a black van and they would be saying "Hey! We're secret services".

Byron: Plain-clothes police or something, perhaps or?

Nicholas: It could have been that, I dunno. It was interesting, anyway, whatever it was.

Byron: Getting back to something you sorta touched on earlier about, y'know, you learned a lot at Occupy, did you also find it, sort of, an educational experience as well, like being involved there?

Nicholas: Yes. I learnt that there is a real sense of unconditional caring, love... I saw UFO's there, that was always educating, and so did other people actually. It's always painful talking about this because, it's difficult. Maybe people don't need to know that all you need to do is look up into the sky every night as a hobby and you'll eventually see something, if you want to.

Byron: Oh, of course.

Nicholas: Y'know, that was exciting. I learnt that people are strong together, because the energy was really intense sometimes. So intense I couldn't even stand in it at times. Because the

collective effort was massive, but I learnt that people can't get anything done if one person doesn't wanna do it. It can affect the whole group, and I made the mistake of not wanting to get involved too much, because I didn't want to take the risk.

Byron: Maybe some of the, I guess, the discussions that were being had there, were you involved in a lot of those kind of discussions that went on? I mean, one thing I have been hearing from other people I have been interviewing is just that it was a real place with a lot of different ideas that were being talked about; do you think you were exposed to some new ideas?

Nicholas: Yes. I didn't know about the [inaudible] trials at the time, I've only recently learnt about them. But, I learnt that the truth is powerful, because even if you don't think it's true, or feel it's true, or know it's true, if you go ahead and try reach it and say it anyway, what you're saying will usually have an effect. That's something I learnt only shortly after I was in Occupy, when I went to Wellington.

Byron: Could you, maybe, talk about the General Assemblies that were there, did you attend the General Assembly's that went on?

Nicholas: The General Assemblies were quite good. I looked forward to those. But, I was unsure about where Occupy was and what it was about, and I learned that what was going on in my head wasn't always reality, so that was a painful wake up call. Not so much in a delusional seeing stuff sense but in a sense that I was a bit a bit concerned or paranoid about the whole Occupy movement in the beginning [that it] was potentially a trap, in that the powers that be just wanted us to use up our efforts and not actually proceed anywhere. And that they wanted it to happen, or whatever, but in the end it doesn't really make sense. But, in the end, I learnt that it's not really real, the fear isn't really real.

Byron: So, you were camping there at Occupy for quite a while, is that correct?

Nicholas: Yes.

Byron: What was that experience like, camping out in a public place, sort of, in the middle of the city? How was that?

Nicholas: Exciting.

Byron: Exciting?

Nicholas: And incredibly intense at times. It was quite cold at the time, I mean, I wasn't taking the best care of myself, unfortunately, but I had support from people there, so I went to stay in tents. I camped with people I considered quite trustworthy, they trusted me as well, which was great. But the difficult thing was that there was so much noise, so much abuse coming from the cars. You were so in the open, it was so raw. You were so, exposed. And it was right by the hospital as well, which was difficult because being angry at the Hospital, what are you gonna do? You're not gonna go up and protest in front of the hospital where people are quite sick. That's a thing you can't really protest against it, in a way, because it's really an internal struggle and if you can get yourself well and then stand up for what you believe is right then that's probably the best thing you can do, and I was a bit of a procrastinator in that sense, or a hypocrite.

But I've found that Occupy had a lot of people from mental health services, who had been there, and they all seemed to dis- some of them seemed to dislike- they may have been through it and not enjoyed it, obviously, because it can be quite a horrible experience. But, there was a lot of support there, and a lot of people there who were going into it. And, I didn't go into it all the way, I was afraid to go into it because there was like a power. Y'know, suddenly, how do you use this power, that we suddenly have? It seemed like this power and numbers, and the opportunity we had and have, still, to do, to deal with all of that. But, what I find sickening is that this system and the industry, seem to make me even more sick. And I gave my power to them, something I regret, I made that choice and I'm never doing it again. Did I answer the question?

Byron: Yeah absolutely. Do you think that the public supported what Occupy was doing?

Nicholas: I think that the public were still, y'know, living their own lives, and they weren't really going to go too much in depth to something that wasn't too much about them, in a way. But I think some of the boy racers woke up, with the police, and there's a sense of corruption happening in Christchurch after the earthquakes. And, the police, held the boy racers in from going out on a race. Not a race, but going out on a charity cruise. Which they were held against their will, unlawfully, for about, it seemed to be for about three, four, five, six hours.

Byron: Yeah, I remember that...

Nicholas: So in a way, that gave Occupy, perhaps an unpleasant, kind of, awareness to them, I suspect, but I dunno. But, I hope that sort of woke people up. There was another, I saw, which was quite disturbing, with the way that Police dealt with people, and the way they... - yeah, it did wake people up to the, to what was going on, because it was so- it was the most central place besides Riccarton in Christchurch, perhaps, that you could get to, well not get to, but it was quite near the city centre. It helped inform people who were walking past Hagley Park, quite a lot and it helped some of the mental health services come down. People who were actually in the services, who were quite great people - gentle, caring people, and they-

Byron: People who worked for the services, you mean?

Nicholas: Yeah, they worked for the services. They came down and they shared and they were great. And not gonna lie, was one of the other people that offered us food. I was a bit wary of accepting, but they were across the road and they came over and helped us out a bit.

Byron: Do you think that Occupy Christchurch was different from the Occupy protests in other cities, because Christchurch had had that experience of going through a natural disaster? Do you think that affected-?

Nicholas: Yeah, big time. Did I think that affected-? Yeah. It affected all of us. There were some really big shakes during the Occupy. And it's quite frightening, because you're right by a big hospital, the last thing you want to do is to imagine that it's gonna collapse. There were some big rolls that were just - it always wakes you up to just how small you feel in the whole mist of everything sometimes. Yeah, the teaching was there, Christchurch has never been the same since the earthquakes because emotionally, everyone was going through a whole lot and the city was lost, in the centre anyway, and it's never gonna be the same. And the people, I don't know... I do

know some people didn't want to be involved in Occupy, because they were quote "under enough stress". Nah, they didn't say that but it seemed that some people didn't want to reach out that far-

Byron: They had other things going on, with the earthquake?

Nicholas: Yeah, that's it. And I couldn't stretch that far either, even when I was there. But i did witness some things that disturbed me about some of the police force.

Byron: Oh yes?

Nicholas: Such as, the way they arrested people and people who I cared about who were in the movement, and it was painful. And it was interesting, it was really disturbing too. I just sat there and watched as some guy was getting tackled down. These police didn't seem to care, and I don't know why he did, so I'm not too sure what was going on, the whole story. But, it was that watching a human being seems to lose a sense of power, and that in itself is a very unpleasant thing. I think it's horrible, just disgusting. And other adults who were there, who apparently were there to help people out, they were screaming and running away! They didn't even think to stand there, they just didn't wanna. It just showed me that even the adults in this country don't seem to be in a position to support the younger people. But they can, obviously. But I was, for example, myself, was accused of being someone I wasn't, and they physically tried to bring me down and-

Byron: It was the police that did that?

Nicholas: Yes. I didn't even commit a crime, and they took me all the way to the police station. I mean, they apologized as they sent me to the door, but that was, what, maybe the second time, there was another time. Ultimately, I think that, I don't really know about the corruption thing perhaps that's a dramatisation of how I was feeling internally, with what was going on for me and I was kinda projecting it out onto others or the circumstances, perhaps. So, I wanna carefully just say, don't - I understand there is corruption out there but I didn't really have the clarity to really say exactly what is corrupted. But the mental health services, I suspect, are corrupted. Not the people, there's some really great people, but I suspect that the way that it's run, whoever's doing the drugs, I'm really concerned about that. Because obviously, I take it. I'm concerned that why should I become dependent on a drug. Shouldn't drugs always be supporting independence? Shouldn't they be supporting a dependence on more- See, if they gave you a PlayStation CD, and put it in a Nintendo, y'know, you wouldn't be able to put it in a Nintendo. But if I gave you the right cartridge, you'd be able to play the console. Use the whole system. So, if I have something that I can take that actually goes in harmony with other things, so I can reach. But anyway, gone off on a tangent there but... I hope somehow this helps out but I'm not sure if I'm even gonna be a very useful interviewee at present, but the Occupy movement fascinated me because of the sheer scale of it. And probably the biggest thing I learnt, in a way, was to, and I'm still learning, is to take responsibility for my own life and that the revolution really begins with me, not necessarily at Occupy.

Byron: So, you think the experience of Occupy has changed you in some ways?

Nicholas: Yeah, the experience and everything changes you in a way, doesn't it? Y'know, it's the harsh lessons were that I've got a lot of changes I need to make, myself. But, yeah.

Byron: Do you think that it changed Christchurch at all? Having that movement here?

Nicholas: In what way? I'm not sure. I think, it gave me a sense of hope. It brought together a community which still communicates with each other to this day. It put its face on the global stage, in a way. It certainly changed me in ways. I've learnt a little bit about the way things work, and I think that kinda helped other people. One of the things that disturbed me quite a bit in the Occupy movement that wasn't so much for the positive; there were some bad things that happened as well.

And that's fucking sad that some of the things that happened there, to me, were disgusting. And I guess, what I tried to learn was that everything is a reflection of myself, even if it's a dark thing. And I tried- I don't really know how to integrate that, if that makes any sense. But I tried to bring myself into the situations that occurred, and I understand that it's probably just best to leave them things alone, but somehow, I feel like maybe I need to go into this. The painful thing is I'm very sensitive to energy and I pick things up, that maybe they come across as smells or whatever, and it's considered delusional and not real. Maybe they aren't real but, to me, what I've picked up there - but anyway, this isn't about me so, I won't go into that. But the, the only thing I had there was - why did we let it happen? Why did it happen? Why did this person get harmed? And, oh, I really didn't speak up about it. I didn't know what to say at the time and I kinda felt like, ever since it happened, it was over, from there, in a sense. I guess you could say, I felt the ship was broken and I had to take care of myself in some ways and I didn't take the risk, I didn't open up to people. I couldn't, I didn't know how to. And I still don't really- I know a little bit more, but I didn't express my anger, in a healthy way but I didn't let it go.

I didn't go full into the Occupy movement, I didn't give it everything I had and I kinda feel like, because of that, how much was that affecting what was going on. And I don't want to know if I was responsible in some way because I was on security and I didn't support - I wasn't on security on the day though, so I'm probably being a bit hard on myself there. But, I feel that I didn't really change, so in a way, I didn't really learn much at Occupy, because of my personal journey. Not really seeming to - but again, I'm being hard on myself. But I did learn that there was people that did listen and it was a very very very good opportunity, it was a positive thing and I just hope that it continues to go on and I'm kinda confused, because I wonder what has the Occupy movement become now? It's become people, the Occupy movement lives with the people, it doesn't live in an object or a statue or a particular building. It's with the people, it seems to be anyway, and that's rippling out.

And that's the tide that's got to turn, but if the tides not turned in me, I can't offer Occupy anything useful. I mean, I can't occupy. I can't occupy, in the movement, because I need to occupy myself and my body. So, that's what I learnt when I was there, but I kinda held back from perhaps the best of the full magnitude of who I was, who I am. And I fear that because I didn't try my best and things that things happened, in a way I was responsible, as we all were for everything that happened, in a way. So, that's what I think is- that may not be accurate though, so... I feel a bit topsy turvy on the whole thing, but yeah, go on. Sorry, not sorry but,

Byron: It's alright. Do you think you'd ever do it again, if there were to be some sort of movement erupts, like Occupy, get involved again?

Nicholas: Yeah, but I'd do it differently. I wouldn't do it the same way, I'd - first try to take care of myself and I wouldn't go into the actual movement and live there. I would stay at home, and take care of myself and still do all the things I need to do so I can be useful, so actually putting out a positive, caring - I'd be caring for the movement by caring for myself, so everyone, in a sense, is already a part of the movement, but they just don't know it. They are contributing for better or for worse. And every single one of us choosing that every day and yet, no matter what we do, no matter what we think, we're always going towards a direction together. And what I fear is, I dunno how accurate this is but, the fence will be burning. Because on one side, there's gonna be maybe a conflict, because if that happens and people keep choosing and then there's a split between that choice where there's total enslavement apparently and then there's freedom for ourselves and then there's that fence that's burning. We're gonna have to choose between what side and that, I think that maybe, what Occupy is, you've gotta choose. But, even if you're physically on the other side, if you're not on the other side in your heart, in terms of where you really stand for the freedom or you stand for the rights of your birthrights, then you could have that taken away because you don't believe you have the power, perhaps. I dunno if that's true or not, but I'm only taking a shot at it, explaining that but, yeah. I would do it again, in a different way. Would you do it again??

Byron: Oh, I think I'd do it again, yeah. But then again, maybe in a different way, like you say.

Nicholas: Oh. Thank you. How would you do it?

Byron: How would I do it? I dunno, but maybe the camp, maybe camping somewhere, it's not the only way to protest, just like marching is one way to protest and, y'know, letter writing campaigns are one way, Occupying was another way and you've got to think about which ways get the best results for particular things.

Nicholas: Protesting is interesting to me because if you protest, how can you win if you're protesting something? Then unless you've got knowledge that you can actually use.

Byron: So, is there anything that you haven't said yet that you'd still like to talk about?

Nicholas: I read on Facebook that you are a known reptilian. [laughs]

Byron: A non-reptilian? Well that's good to know.

Nicholas: The good thing is – no apparently you are- The good thing is, reptilians have their advantage as well, from what I've heard anyway. I've got a little something, I drew this, I put it on before but I -

Byron: I see, so you've got –it says Nick and Byron, Occupy, 2011 October the 15th.

Nicholas: It's incredible. Its two years ago.

Byron: It is, it's amazing how quickly that time's passed. So, just to describe this, since there's no video or anything, this is a carved letter O, O for Occupy. And it has on there our names on it, and under my name it says the “known” and known is a quote, reptilian

Nicholas: it's very off topic, “reptilian”

Byron: 'Don't worry apparently they're benevolent. Also' there's a Guy Fawkes mask on the word Occupy, there's a drawing of some tents and trees and the area that looks like a General Assembly, sorta area and it has the dates on there "2011 October 15" and then interview 2013.

Nicholas: It could do with a bit of colour, but Yeah, I'll work on it.

Byron: Excellent.

Nicholas: I really do want to bring more to this, however, I just feel that I just can't seem to bring more into it.

Byron: That's fine.

Nicholas: It's a pretty intense environment here, which we're all mad at the moment because I've got some very unpleasant, unfortunate neighbours, but it's a whole learning process anyway. And I'm still learning so, in Occupy, if we are still learning something then we are still occupying something, aren't we? We're occupying our learning. Occupy. Occupy is a word in itself, obviously. In a sense, Occupy has always been there, we just, kind of, became aware of each other, in a way, but anyway, I'm going on a tangent.

Byron: Well, thank you very much for your time and for wanting to participate in this project.

Nicholas: No worries. I hope it's help in some way. Thank you for your time and thank you for coming out here and thank you for continuing to support the way you do. And, I'm sure that eventually- anyway, go on and change a bit. I hope that people, more than anything, I hope Occupy wakes people up to who they really are. It helps them become who they really are because without that we have got a revolution, we don't have that. But if we blindly forge forward, I don't think we would actually get anywhere. That's a difficult thing, with the reason I tried to step back from Occupy, but it's because I can't really contribute, I don't seem to be able to contribute. But what I want to contribute, which is to help others through their shit. And if I've got my own shit, I can't really seem to step into the shit and come through clean on the other side, so I need to - anyway going off on a tangent. Thank you.

Rob Read

Recorded Sixteenth May 2013

Byron: So I'll start off by asking, how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Rob: I heard about it through a few different groups but the Christchurch one, I'd been following the overseas movement a little bit, but then I'd heard through a couple of the different activist groups that I've been involved with about them wanting to do one here in Christchurch, found out that yep it definitely was go and then started getting on the organising committee for it.

Byron: So you were involved before even the camp site started?

Rob: Yep definitely I did a lot of the advertising getting posters out there getting the word out there a lot of online media for it

Byron: And what was your role on the initial march that started the occupation?

Rob: A few different things, when I first turned up there on day one I was the first to arrive and kinda looked round and was like, "there's next to nobody here" but I mean with an hour there was a good couple of hundred people already there and then by the time we actually marched having that couple of thousand, during that march I think I took my usual role of being the human megaphone and leading some chants and getting right up there with everyone else

Byron: So you'd obviously been an activist before Occupy?

Rob: Yep I've done quite a bit of different activist work with the workers' rights, human rights all those sort of things

Byron: And you camped there that first night?

Rob: Yep I stayed there right from that very first night right through till about day eighty, I think I was only away all up for about a week of that and that was during the time I went down to check out a couple of other Occupies in the South Island

Byron: So what was the atmosphere like at Occupy like on that first day?

Rob: I think to begin with there was a lot of uncertainty, I mean arriving there day one we weren't even sure if we were going to be camping there the first night whether it was just going to be a huge march and that was it or whether we were going to do, follow the overseas Occupies and actually set up camp, and you know, occupy that space. So on that very first night I think everyone was just on massive highs, I mean there were people doing fire poi and all that sort of stuff there, there was a lot of celebration and everyone was quite in high spirits.

Setting up camp I think the first night we only had about dozen tents set up then yeah it just kept exploding from there. That first night was definitely, the first day was uncertain, but the first night was just a huge celebration

Byron: And then what happens when everybody wakes up the next day and realises they've made the commitment to occupy a space sort of indefinitely, so how did the second day go?

Rob: I think it was kinda the uncertainty came back as you know, "what do we do from here" there

was a lot of different views coming out from different people from obviously different backgrounds. Some people were saying, you know, we need to get out and do daily in-your-face sort of stuff with people, and then other people saying, no we need to get ourselves set up secure here trying to set up basically a home base.

Other people saying 'let's just go with the flow' there was just so many different ideas coming out, I think there was a lot of throwing back different ideas between us all to work out what we want to do as a group.

Byron: So this is probably when the general assemblies began?

Rob: Yep. The GA, I think, can't remember whether the first GA was that morning or if we did it in that evening, I'm pretty sure was that morning as you know we started off doing them twice daily. But yes so then the first GA was exactly that, basically it was ideas flying around and working out what we wanted to do.

Byron: And obviously the decision was made to continue camping. But then obviously there were other activities as well that the Occupy sort of group was doing, so what were the activities that began?

Rob: There [were] quite a lot of different things that happened throughout the time that I was there. We did get behind quite a few different protests including when the wharfies and meat workers got locked out, we got in behind helping those protests, including I remember one particular protest that we did down on Blenheim Road outside Westmeats and there was only a reasonably small select group of us that went down but we definitely made an impact, which is kind of more what I was hoping we would do as part of Occupy, more than the actual getting out there being, you know, activists and getting the word out there about the corporate greed and that the way so many businesses in New Zealand are so corrupt.

When people just go "oh no we don't have corruption in New Zealand" but yeah. On top of that we also had people going on talking to general members of the public as they walked by or ran around the park. We did quite a few different marches, like we did a march for Human Rights Day and we, you know, that was more of a parade than a march though, it quite a, more of a celebratory thing you know. There was so many things, and there was on site we did picnic days, when people came down and had picnics, we did on the free market where people would come down and donate goods and you know literally if there was something that you needed or wanted you to take it away with you. I remember the first time we did that I was a wee bit iffy about it because I personally wouldn't have been the sort of person that would go along and just "oh yeah that looks nice I'll take that with me, it would feel a bit odd to me" but the thing that kind of lifted my hope with that was I remember this father coming down with his two kids and the father said to the two kids, you know, you can each pick one thing, and the kids picked their thing, they left and then about half an hour, an hour later, you see them come back and donate probably about eight to ten things back to it, and to me that was just like exactly what we need, you know that sharing of resources, sharing of things where we've all got when there's so many other people out there that don't have them.

Byron: So there's a couple of things from that I'd like to touch on. I guess first of all just that idea there, did you feel that Occupy was kind of creating a community that was a bit like what the

people there wanted to see, kind of wider society?

Rob: Yeah I definitely think we got, we definitely heading to that point, I mean we had a community garden going there for a while. There was just literally a lot of people just sharing their skills, their knowledge and their particular resources to help everybody else out, which is exactly what, you know, we should be doing day to day anyway in my opinion.

Byron: And the other thing was just about the overseas movement, you obviously saw or the ideas of Occupy as being really relevant in New Zealand. Did you feel that Occupy was just as relevant here as it was on Wall Street or London?

Rob: yeah I definitely think it was just as relevant, I just don't think that that New Zealand Occupiers were as clear about pointing out what the message we were trying to put out there was, so I definitely think for me one of the big reasons I got in was the corruption inside the New Zealand- not just inside New Zealand government, but inside New Zealand businesses as a whole. Getting that message out there and going, you know, it doesn't have to be this way, was kind of the original big reason I want to get involved. I definitely would say it was just as relevant here as it was overseas.

Byron: And so you, being there for long and quite often, you really saw the camp site develop, so it started with about a dozen tents, how did it build from there? I mean obviously there were more tents, how else did the actual physical site change?

Rob: I think there was... we got a really good kitchen and, kind of, communal area going, where we had like a different tent for different things. We had a lot of electricity that we were providing on site for, you know, media and that side of things.

The different personalities coming in. I mean daily you'd have maybe someone new come, or someone that's been there a while go, so it was an ever changing environment, but it was always growing, there was always something going on, and I think one of things that really disappointed me in, especially in the earlier days, is a lot of the media reports saying, you know, we were sitting there doing nothing during the days. A lot of the times, you know might look like they're from the outside, but a lot of the time we were sitting around we were talking in groups about things that we want to change and how can we change these things. Yeah, so, I think that camp site itself, I think the highest I remember was that thirty two tents, from memory, and we had everything from local Christchurch residents to people that were travelling throughout the New Zealand Occupies, too people that were media affiliated that were coming into check it out and staying with us for a few nights, to complete out of towners, backpackers, people that, I remember a few people that had been overseas to the London and the New York Occupies and just happened to be in New Zealand at this point so they thought they'd come and check it out and stay for a few days.

It was, yeah, such a huge global movement that was recognised globally and somewhere safe and somewhere you could go if you really want to help make change.

Byron: So these sort of talks, this sitting in groups talking were obviously a big part of Occupy, something that seems to be a thread running through these interviews is 'contesting ideas', did you

find that there were contesting ideas, you touched on that a little already, but among the people who came along to be involved in Occupy, contesting ideas about what Occupy should do but also what society should be like and so on?

Rob: Oh definitely, I mean one of the things that before Occupy, I only kind of heard a little bit about kind of just in passing, was things like the Zeitgeist movement, and the resource based economy side of things. And I mean you could sit down with somebody and talk about what their ideals were and you'd hear a completely different thing to what you are, but you'd go "that could make sense" and then of course there was a lot of people where they'd sit and they'd debate, I wouldn't say it was arguing, a lot of people tried to say there was a lot of arguing, I thought a lot of that was debating different ideas.

Like from my point of view I think, you know, Christchurch showed it quite well after the earthquakes that we could look after ourselves. Those first few days before the government really got involved, we kind of looked after ourselves and that's what I'd like to see as a global sort of thing, is people looking up to people rather than having to stand by this one set of guidelines sort of thing, and then at the same time hearing other people's point of view, things like the resource based economy and that sort of stuff. It really opened my mind at least, as to different ideals out there that really could work.

Byron: And probably it was one of the few, maybe the first time that people from so many different kind of, so many different ideas had really came together in a physical space

Rob: Definitely. Again I wasn't even aware of certain groups in Christchurch, let alone in New Zealand, suddenly these people that, you know, I wish I'd known about years ago, pop up and come along with the different ideas and their different backgrounds, it was just amazing the amount of different people and different ideas that really were in this one shared space.

Byron: Do you think that they kind of network of people has remained even after the camp site is gone?

Rob: I can only speak for me personally but I've kept in touch with a few of the people that really kind of opened my mind. But I don't think it's as strong or as prevalent as it was at the site. I think having the site there definitely was kind of this nice open forum for the sort of conversations to happen, but that, I mean these are the conversations that you don't generally get into unless you run into the person.

Byron: We're in a time now where a lot of people will say that because of the Internet we have this amazing tool for communicating and spreading ideas and information sort of globally, but despite that do you think that, having a real sort of concentrated physical space was also important for that sort of thing, for the spread of information and ideas?

Rob: Oh definitely. I mean, you can sit at home on the Internet and search anything, but you're always going to come up with a thousand different theories, a thousand different people's ideas, whereas if you're able to physically sit down with somebody and have that conversation with them, then you can hear where they're coming from, you can ask him direct questions about it and actually have a full on in depth conversations instead of sitting there just reading a couple of

articles. So I think have a physical space there for that, definitely was a huge, huge movement in itself.

Byron: the other thing that a physical occupation raises is the question of, is... 'What's the meaning of public space' and 'how can public space be used' do you have any comments on that?

Rob: I think a lot of people need to probably become more informed as to, you know, what is public space and who actually owns that public space. Because from doing different protests and stuff in the past, you can be standing literally right that's what a business as long as it's, you're standing on the footpath and that's public space, you're not doing anything wrong, but you take a couple of steps back and you're now on private property, I think people need to become more understanding of what, for instance what our taxes actually pay for, you know, it's a tax they pay for the up keep and for us to have the space, but it's not very commonly actually realized. So I think, you know, the global movement sort of taking back what is already ours, and then having, you know, police or government come in and say 'no you can't' and then go 'well we actually own it' was a huge thing because it showed people actually willing to stand up for what is already theirs.

Byron: because like you say as well, private space is not... cannot be political space, if you are protesting and even when it's a sort of pseudo public space like a mall, it might be publicly accessible but you can't even hand out a leaflet there.

Rob: As we encountered [Laughs]

Byron: Do you think a different attitude was had to us in Christchurch, being in Hagley Park, simply because we were, a little bit off to the side due to the fact that the central city was pretty much inaccessible at that time and we couldn't be in the main square as Occupy encampments in other cities were, do you think that made a bit of a difference?

Rob: I definitely do I think we would have got, I don't know whether it would be called a better response, but we would have got more of a response if we could have been in the heart of our city. I mean there was constantly talk, especially towards the last couple of months of me being there, of moving the camp as the C.B.D. got slowly opened, moving ourselves closer and closer to that C.B.D, and in fact I remember one of the sites that we went and looked at was directly opposite the Christchurch Central Police Station, would have been ideal space other than the fact that it got flooded out. But I think, you know, for me, the Occupy was a movement, we were never set to be in a stationary place, and I think that was what a lot of people kind of got caught up on, as 'we need to look after this one place because this is our place' and there is so much public space out there that we could have used, so much more room that we could have gone to, but I think the conflicting ideas from different people, kind of maybe pulled that back, because I know for a fact there was a group but they were quite happy to go out there and be right in the face of the public and go "we're here, this is what we're standing for." But then there's other people going "you don't know, we need to be fun friendly sort of atmosphere". For me, you know, a protest does need to have its peaceful aspect, definitely, but I don't think that means straying away from being right out there you know in front of people.

Byron: In what other ways do you think Occupy Christchurch was different from Occupy

elsewhere, because we were in a city that was in the aftermath of a natural disaster?

Rob: I think we had a lot of people being a lot more sympathetic to us in Christchurch in comparison to the other places, I mean when I went down to Occupy Dunedin, when they were in the heart of their city right in the Octagon surrounded by night clubs, the two nights that I stayed down there was a Friday and Saturday night, and you don't get time to rest at that site on a weekend because you've constantly got drunks coming up, drunk people coming out wanting to either debate with you, which was actually really cool, we managed to, you know, open a few people's minds doing that, at the same time you had people constantly trying to smash down tents, set things on fire, fight people, and we never really got that in Christchurch which I'm very glad about.

Byron: not even on the night of the Rugby World Cup.

Rob: No. I mean, I think we only had, from what I remember we had one threat to somebody trying to, actually do damage to the tents, and one group of drunk people come through, and they were a group of about thirteen, fourteen year olds that had just come from Sparks in the Park or Christmas in the park, and that was it. At least, you know, for that first wee while at least that I was staying there full time, there was no issue, whereas if you go down to Dunedin, Invercargill-even Invercargill which was quite set back from the main road, they still constantly people coming up to them, whereas in Christchurch I think people were a little bit more open minded a little sympathy because they could see the corruption going on around them. They could see the way people like CERA and EQC were treating people and treating their homes. So yeah, I think people in Christchurch were a lot more sympathy than other cities, at least that I visited

Byron: Do you think that Occupy changed Christchurch at all? Do you think anything is different in this city because there was an Occupy movement that had such a presence for several months?

Rob: The only thing I would probably say is that, a lot more people now are willing to stand up and actually have their say, and you know, realize that getting out there and getting involved, having your say, and just making your voices heard. People realize that actually does matter and can be done. I remember from the all the projects I'd done prior to occupy it was always very familiar faces, familiar people that went along to these protests, and then Occupy hit and I was surrounded by hundreds of people that I'd never seen at a protest before my life, and now seeing a few of those same people getting involved in other protests to do with very similar ideals to what Occupy was, that corruption within the system. So I think, you know, a definitely made people more willing to stand up and have their say, rather than just sit back and be told "this is how it's going to be". Yeah.

Byron: Do you think the experience of Occupy changed the people who were involved in it? people directly involved, like there on the site?

Rob: I think for some people it did, and I think others, not at all. I think everybody took something away from it, but I don't know whether it actually made really a difference to some people that were there.

Byron: So what were the, the sort of the demographics like, who were the people who came and

Occupied?

Rob: To begin with quite a, kind of like almost three separate groups, there was the uni students [who] were well educated, very up there, but still quite young. There was the seasoned activists, the ones that have been kind of in this sort of world for a while, and then he was kind of, to begin with at least it wasn't so much of it but especially as the Occupy movement moved on a lot more of the youth, and for me anyway I think some of the youth were purely there for the thrill of camping in Hagley Park, rather than the actual cause that we were there for. I remember sitting down with a couple of youth and asking, you know, "what brought you down here, what made you want come here?" and a lot them were just like "it's just cool man!" and then I remember sitting down with one, and I was like, this guy is going to have no clue -no clue- sat down and ended up having a couple of hours conversation because he was there for the cause, and I remember a few people coming down, originally for the fun, the excitement of sleeping in a tent, in the middle of- well as close to the middle of the city as you could get in Christchurch- but then actually realizing what we were doing there and actually then fighting for the cause, that was so amazing for me anyway, just seeing these people come down, just for the thrill of it and then having the minds and eyes opened to what actually goes on daily around us.

Byron: And there were of course homeless people as well would come to Occupy.

Rob: Yeah that was for me, I don't think it was so much that to begin with, definitely later on there was a lot more of the homeless people in Christchurch coming down, which of course post-earthquakes just hundreds of these people that are now even still today sleeping in the backs of their cars and stuff, but coming down, and, there was a lot of mixed emotions about that. There were people saying "that's awesome that's exactly why we're here" and then there were other people saying "all they're going to do is cause trouble" and then there were other people that would just be like "you know that's cool, but if you gonna come down here you're going to be staying at the site you need to help out on the site as well" which nine times out of ten the homeless community that came down was actually more prevalent and more willing to help out around the site than some of the other people that had been there for ages. So yeah I think definitely having the homeless people down there definitely helped bring part of the point we were trying to get across more real, and the fact of, you know, there is such a huge third world culture in New Zealand, that these people are living on the streets and, you know, so many people support overseas kids and things but they don't notice what's actually going on their own backyard, and I think charity has to begin to home, I think you have to look after your neighbour first, because if we actually all looked after each other then there wouldn't be this, such a huge issue.

Byron: Do you think that Occupy in part drew more attention to the fact that there was that sort of situation in Christchurch, with the homelessness?

Rob: Oh definitely. I mean I think pre-Occupy there was next to no real open conversation about the housing crisis in New Zealand. But post Occupy I remember coming and sitting at home watching the news and seeing it all over the news that at long last, that it was finally actually being recognized that there were these issues and these things need to be addressed because all it's doing is, eventually it's going to hit, you know, the tourism market and things that and it's just going to make people not want to come here, and I mean New Zealand is such a beautiful country

that, why would you not want people to come here? So, yeah.

Byron: Do you think that because of Occupy the media started looking a bit more at the things we were talking about like that and like corruption and so on?

Rob: Yeah I definitely think that the media started looking more locally and nationally rather than globally, which was one of the big things that we wanted to achieve, is to, you know, get people talking about these issues rather than just going, "oh yeah, that happens, it sucks but it happens" how about we actually start doing something about it, and I think that's, one re this is one real change that's really been brought from the Occupy movement, is that people are actually out there now trying to create this change.

Byron: So do you think people who were involved in Occupy continued working for social change in different ways?

Rob: I think a good majority the people that were involved probably have yeah.

Byron: And again on the media, what are your thoughts about how the media covered Occupy Christchurch itself, as in the people in the camp site?

Rob: Well because I was down there permanently I didn't get to see a lot of the media, however I was in regular contact with one of the girls from *NewsTalk ZB* she was ringing me almost every two weeks to get an update, where we were at, what's going on, what we have we got in the pipeline, all the sort of thing. So from the bits and pieces I heard I thought it was actually quite well portrayed but at the same time there was still that mainstream media, a little swing on it where it's, "these are just freedom campers trying to do nothing but cause trouble." But then there was a lot of, I remember a couple of radio times with it open it up to a conversation and then you'd hear more people talking positively about the Occupy movement, than you would negatively, and I mean I remember us all sitting there about fifteen of us all sitting there with our cell phones one night ringing through trying to get airtime to have our say, and you know the second somebody gets off the phone it was high fives around and hugs and, yeah.

Byron: So you feel that the position of Occupy among the public, it was more positive than negative?

Rob: I think for the time that I was there definitely, I think the time after I left, In my opinion anyway occupy had really changed, that was part of the reason I left. But I think to begin with, you know, it definitely was- there was a lot more positive public opinion about it than there was negative, and I think even, you know, even towards the end of the Occupy movement in Christchurch he was probably still more people in support than there were against it, as a movement as a whole, I think it was just some of the practices that were happening at the site that people were more against than the actual movement.

Byron: So where did things go wrong?

Rob: that that's a really hard kind of situation to [be] put in. For me, I think... we needed to be more... working together as a group, we became quite divided, there was a lot of, like, two particular groups that would constantly go off and either drink or do drugs, and the opinions on

that, as to whether you could do it on site were also divided. I mean, there was, towards the end there was so much kind of disagreements on how things should be going on side then actual people trying to work together to create change, and more trying to sort of selves out than actually trying to sort the issues.

Byron: It became more inward focused than outward focused?

Rob: Definitely.

Byron: Do you think it could happen again, something like Occupy?

Rob: I definitely think it could happen again. I think if it was going to happen again they'd need to have a clear sense of direction and a clear sense of exactly what we're going to do and how we're going to achieve these goals rather than all going in and just going "right, so what now?"

Byron: so something more organised and less haphazard?

Rob: Yeah.

Byron: But occupying spaces as a method of protest, do you feel that's an effective method of protest, and worthwhile?

Rob: I think if executed correctly then definitely. I think when executed incorrectly it just, kind of makes everybody laugh to be honest; it just makes everybody go "Well you can't even sort yourselves out, so how you going to solve these problems?"

Byron: So what are some of your best memories from the time you were at the Occupy camp site?

Rob: hands down the best one has gotta be that day one day one march. Hands down one of the biggest marches I've been a part of, and so uplifting reviving to see all these people actually coming out gave a damn. I think some of the GA's, just, you know, to begin with It was kind of all, we don't really know each other's personalities, we don't know each other we don't know how each other going to take to this point. But towards the- you know, once we got a couple of weeks in, everybody kinda knew each other, was on more 'fun, friendly' conversation in it rather than just disagreements. It had a lot more older [people]. Things like doing the fire poi and stuff at night, just doing things as a community, were absolutely awesome. I remember having musicians coming down and playing on the weekends, and doing the free barbecue. One of the marches they did that I ended up staying back at the site for, they all came back and we had the barbecue fired up with, you know, serving both vegetarian foods and non-vegetarian foods, and everybody just coming together and talking. So actually you know, people from so many different backgrounds, so many different worlds, all just coming together and actually talking, was just, yeah, absolutely amazing.

Byron: So you feel of something like Occupy were to happen again would you get involved?

Rob: In all honesty yes I probably would, but I'd probably be a little bit more, cautious about how I approached it. I went in kind of, all arms swinging ready to go, let's really rip up some issues and let's make some true change, and I just remember over time just having that slowly drained out of me. But yeah, I mean, I'd definitely go- I'd probably get back involved, but I just be a little bit more cautious about how I approached it.

Byron: And just finally, are there any further things you'd like to share or say about Occupy Christchurch?

Rob: I think the only other thing would be, there was a lot of controversy and stuff around when me and my partner left. We left for a few different reasons, definitely the biggest one being -and I mean it was probably when the media went absolutely berserk on Christchurch Occupy-when my partner was the victim of a sexual assault there. I remember saying to her, because we left the site that night and went back and stayed at her dads, I came back the next day and was by actually ready to pick my stuff up and go home with her, but then without her even telling me she turns up and she says "no we're staying" that was just huge to me, that you know, she's just had this happen and yet she still wants to be here for the cause. That was huge. But to me that definitely kind of pulled me back and made me want to go 'hang on we need to re-evaluate things here'.

And then, the other kind of the big reason is, for me, as I said the biggest reason I got involved is I am an activist I like to get out there and make the points known, whereas it became a lot more inward focused and to me that's not why I was there. What they were doing on site I could have been doing just as easily from home, and making probably just as big if not a bigger impact. And there was a lot of, kind of, stuff that I didn't agree with happening on site, including a lot of drinking on site, a lot of drugs being done on site, I had no problem if people went off and had a couple drinks, in fact there were a couple of nights where I went away and had a couple of drinks and came back the next morning. But I think to be doing it on site; all it was going to do was get the space shut down quicker, and getting the space shut down... Basically I think at that point is what drove the ones who were there originally for the full cause away, is that the amount of drinking and amount of, people just not caring about the site anymore and I think that was really disheartening to a lot of people, but, you know, as I said if they were to launch something like it again, I'd definitely want to get involved knowing me, but I think it just needs a little bit more organisation, and a little bit more direction. So yeah.

Byron: so you felt that you were involved for as long as Occupy was doing something useful in terms of activism and you ceased to be involved when that time could be more effectively used otherwise?

Rob: Yep. I mean put it, and I said this to a lot of the media and stuff that I did speak to is, I was the first to arrive on day one and I'll be the last to leave on the last day, the way I view it, in my opinion, I probably was the last actual activist to leave. I went back after that day eighty, after that I went back a few times and tried to re-launch or to get it back into shape and give it another real shot with a couple of other people like Tina Dockerty was a great one there. But just giving it a real chance, but it just keep falling down, which was definitely disappointing, I mean we get it going great for a couple days and it would just fall flat. I definitely wish that we, if it had still been able to, if we'd still been able to run it the way we'd began to, that we could still be here today, and still be making that point and actually doing some real change. But yeah, the second it stopped becoming active and actually getting out there and saying this is what we're doing, this is how we're going to make some change, It lost its direction, lost its focus for me. So yeah.

Danielle O'Halloran

Recorded Seventh January 2014

Byron: I'll start by asking you, how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Danielle: Yeah, well. Around the same time as Occupy was starting I had become aware of fracking. And that was a big kind of shift in awareness for me around politics but also around environmental politics and kind of joined up with thinking around not just what I had been involved with in the past which was treaty activism or anti-racism activism or identity work for pacific peoples, particularly New Zealand born, and in the arts. But also around you know, kinda where we are locally here in Canterbury and that something as big as oil and gas drilling was potentially going to start to affect us in Canterbury.

So that was kind of, yeah, a shift in awareness for me that occurred just prior to the Occupy movement kinda beginning. And so I'd become involved with a group of people who kinda were also interested in activities around anti-fracking and particularly Karen De LaTour who was a friend of mine and she kind of encouraged me to connect in with the work that they were doing to plan a concert called I think, 'Bring Change' is the concert that they did which is a...to bring awareness around issues around fracking and that it was plans were afoot to do that locally inland in Canterbury but also deep-sea drilling off the coast as well not just for oil but for shale gas. So, with those things kind of brewing, Occupy seemed like another really, well a joined-up way to bring a whole lot of issues to the fore. I was just so relieved really to see Canterbury, to see Christchurch people with energy after the quakes wanting to, you know, tap into an international scale event that was about consciousness shift as much as it was about politics or, you know, awareness of how the market is affecting ordinary people's lives. The things that aren't working in regard to banking and those kinds of big issues that are hard to talk about in the everyday but that suddenly there was this opportunity, this sense of community around those issues. So I was really appreciative of that and to be a part of it I suppose. Even in a small way.

Byron: So you heard about it through those sorts of activist groups?

Danielle: Yeah. Really through old friends as well. I think Jo Wildish maybe sent me an invite to come along to one of the occupy marches. And we'd known each other for a long time, around activist circles I suppose, in Christchurch. Back in the day we were protesting against GAT and the Enough is Enough rally around changes to beneficiary cuts in the late 90s. Yeah, so there was a community of people I was aware of, but it was much bigger than that and that's what was exciting, seeing a lot of young people politicised in a way that I kinda hadn't seen for a long time, not since my twenties when there was a few, you know, of these punks and activists who were workshopping and talking about issues really publicly and it felt like there was a bit of a, yeah, a community around being political and then it just seemed to die down a bit for a while. Actually after the October raids for a lot of us because that changed how I think people felt comfortable to take action, unfortunately, even though we didn't like to think of it as changing things I think it did, I think it really impacted activist circles around the country. [Laughs] That's a tricky one, yeah.

Byron: So you were involved sort of right from the start?

Danielle: No, I mean I really just came and visited and was on the outskirts, very much, but I guess I came along on one of the marches that was I think the first march and walked with my little sign about fracking I think and caught up with some old friends on the way, walking down the road to Riccarton, it was really funny for me walking down Riccarton Road, which is sort of an area I grew up in, with these big signs about Gerry Brownlee or whatever and John Key and I just, I just appreciated that sense that people were growing in awareness, being politicised about things that mattered to them and there was a whole raft of issues that people were bringing to the table, I guess, and having conversations. So later, I think, in the piece, I can't remember exactly who it was who invited me to come along to speak about fracking, and really I don't feel like an expert in it. I'm just one of the many ordinary people who kind of became aware that stuff was starting to happen in our backyard, really literally in Canterbury, and that had already been happening off the coast, sort of just prior to the Canterbury earthquakes in 2011. So you know, all of that, I think I'm just one of those ordinary people that kind of got a little bit involved and inspired by the movement.

Byron: So, did you stay at the campsite at all?

Danielle: I didn't stay. I had, yeah, I've got three kids so I would come and visit and ask people to keep me kind of posted about what they were up to, so, Jo was really good about that. I, yeah, the main thing I did was take a bunch of fliers along and talk to, i dunno, I guess a group of about twenty, about Fracking and it was a pretty, kinda small part to play in connecting in but in that sense it was just, it was useful for me to see that there were people who were, like I say prepared to kind of put their lives on hold and live in a way that was standing publicly for things that a whole lot of other people felt but might not have the tenacity or the sort of circumstances that would allow them to take time out and park up in a tent for that long. But, you know I hope they realise, I mean I think they did, they were doing it not just for themselves but for a lot of people who wanted to be, but, you know, perhaps found it difficult to do that, in that way.

Byron: So what were some of the things you were involved in? You've mentioned going on the first march and speaking about fracking?

Danielle: Yeah, so really my connection was around the Say No to Fracking and Drilling In Canterbury [and] in the South Island and they established- I'm one of the admins on a Facebook page for a group that started, like I say, around that time, to bring awareness about those issues in Canterbury, and so that's what we saw, the connect point being for that group to the Occupy movement was just being part of that wave of awareness I guess and having, you know, in a lot of ways its online presence these days as much as it is people camping out and having a public demonstration over such a long period of time, but kind of a bunch of those things combined: media coverage of Occupy, the, like I say, the growth of online activism was kind of where I was at that time. So, I mean I had time at home to put a little post up on Facebook, on our Facebook page, for Say No to Fracking and Drilling and connect information to people that way and that, I guess it sort of helped that there was this swelling of awareness from people around a whole lot of issues. I remember that day, the first march. In the process of preparing to start walking, sitting down at the camp with a bunch of young girls who, maybe they were about 17, 18 and they were fully versed in a whole bunch of issues that I certainly wasn't as articulate about at that age. I was,

I kinda had awareness of social justice but nowhere near the analysis that they were able to, you know, just talk about quite casually and I mentioned “oh you know, have you heard about fracking as well, there’s this other stuff that’s going on, and it’s happening here, or it’s about to happen here” and they said “yeah, yeah, no we have heard a little bit about that. It’s been on the news and, you know I heard it on *National Radio*” and we’ve been part of getting those stories out there on *National Radio* and into *The Press*, certainly by talking to people like Vicki Anderson and so there were, you know it was kind of this...it was just neat to be there and to see, sounds cheesy eh, like a new generation, but like just a wide range, actually, of younger and older people getting ready to talk about stuff, and what comes with that will be really interesting but I’m not sure yet what the results will be of that awareness change but I think it’s contributed to something.

Byron: So you found Occupy was a very, a receptive environment to those ideas you were bringing in around fracking and on environmental issues?

Danielle: Yeah, I think people had begun to have awareness of those issues, particularly you know with analysis, I guess, of corporate greed and ‘money before people,’ it’s kind of an easy leap to make to question what the kind of results might be for New Zealand getting involved in big oil and gas. So while I think there’s all sorts of issues that connect to the problems with the financial system, some are not very difficult leaps at all to make, and so that was not, that was one of them that was kind of pretty much interrelated quite closely. So I found people were either already having those conversations about that issue or who wanted to know more and weren’t sure exactly what it was.

So it was just a burgeoning awareness and then, of course, there was a big kind of analysis of it on TV, you know, and different journalists took up the challenge to analyse it. To some extent that was great but I think conversations between people, face-to-face, is always just, you know it’s really worthwhile. And I learnt a lot too, yeah, from some of that analysis that’s around, and you know I’m no statistics or math person, but around you know just the really wide, the much wider gap than I think I even thought there was, between the very rich and the rest of us. And I know certainly being Pacific and having, for instance, having a degree and being a Pacific Island person in New Zealand you’re already aware of your privilege, because you’re one of 5% of the rest of us who don’t and who aren’t on, and so that’s, in my day job, that’s my working area is around equity issues for Pacific people, particularly students trying to gain access to, if you like, the market, through education.

But there are enormous problems with that pathway because the market itself, once you have your degree and you, and those opportunities open out for you, you know we rely on our values to, as Pacific people, to somehow enable change in that system, even with the path that’s required. So, I guess seeing discussion of what we value, what we value as, just as people, really, ‘cause it’s an international movement right, but particularly here in Canterbury, ‘cause we’re talking around Christchurch Occupy, for me I thought it was really interesting to see discussion about values and what we value.

We’re having that discussion all the time around trying to see how the systems that we’re within might be able to be influenced or changed by our Pacific values of respect of *Ala’laofa*, or service. And so those sorts of core Pacific values; if they were able to influence, we often think

about this, if our students were able to influence, even just a little bit, in terms of the systems they go out and work within, and are able to retain their values, even with their degrees and their qualifications and their moving through the hierarchies that are in place. I guess that's the change point, the change levers, that we are interested in, and that we talk about a lot of the time working in education with Pacific. But even more than that, you know, an entire system shift would be pretty cool, but it'll take incredibly joined-up thinking, international groundswell, yeah; that classic thing of 'power to the people' you know, it was really really cool to see a wide variety of people at those Occupy events, like it was inspiring for lots of different people in lots of different ways.

Byron: Just something out of that: it seemed that perhaps Pacifica People were under-represented in Occupy. Do you think that was the case?

Danielle: I think yeah, I mean that's usually the case with activism. There's lots of reasons why that is. It's not to say that they're not conscious and active in attempting to engage with politics or with the priorities that affect Pacifica people. I come out of, I guess, a legacy of activists in a sense. Not directly in my family but when I'm talking about Pacific activism I'm thinking of the people that mentored me like Freedom Road Works, and they're a Dunedin based group who started in the late '80s and were tauiwi, Pacific and Maori and Pakeha families who decided to home school their kids so that they could, in a sense, opt-out of the system, so that they could ensure that their children weren't brainwashed and colonised, so their whole agenda was decolonisation of the mind for themselves and their children, yeah, and their whānau.

And they, you know for instance, would come up here and take us on a hui around that sort of stuff. In fact, the last one I went on with them was maybe 2001, the weekend before the twin towers collapsed. And again they're, yeah, they're coming at it from a values based around family, around activism that's actually around not just leaving the home to engage with politics somewhere on the outside, but taking your whole family and your whānau with you on that journey of awareness; and so that's, I think that's where I connect and that's where a lot of Pacific people may not necessarily know how to connect with something like Occupy or it's about, you know, publically 'sitting in', if you like, and showing that kind of dissension, you know. And it just depends on your networks, like I, I think it kind of all relates, but they might not all know each other, you know what I mean, like what I'm thinking of is another young group in Christchurch who, one of the women's groups I belong to now, called Pacifika, which is one of the oldest Pacific male or female groups in the country, but it happens to be a women's group and it's a national body and incorporated society at the national level, but in our branch here in Christchurch we helped umbrella a group of young people called PYLAT: Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation back in 2010 and that's, they've continued meeting and become an independent body now of, sort of, I think they were originally 14-25 year-olds.

Similar age group now, but they're having very political discussions, I mean separate to Occupy, but they're having the same sort of discussions and debates. They're just doing that within their own Pacific community and I think it would be foolish to see them as entirely separate. I think its timing; it's about how things build on each other. Even if they're not meeting in the same room, they're hearing, I mean you know, Occupy was a pretty public movement and an international

movement so those young people have grown up, in a sense, with things like that happening and being normalised again. As the whole world responded to the financial crisis in different ways, and Occupy was one of them, and, you know, these young people are having monthly debates about issues from the living wage to, I think they're next one coming up is oil drilling, deep sea drilling sorry. The one prior to that was around referenda and asset sales. And they're doing it in a very kind of organised way, very independent way, not with a lot of umbrella-ing from older organisations anymore, but getting on with the job of conscientizing each other, asking people to come in and speak to them, from both sides of each debate, so that they're really choosing to in a sense be quite, they're allowing the conversation to dictate how their opinions are going, they're not coming at it with an assumption, which I think is a really beautiful thing as well. They're truly aiming for that kind of learning but I think Occupy was similarly about, you know, it was people and I think I heard an ACT guy stand up and talk at Occupy as well as, you know, people from all sorts of other local bodies like one of them was the guy I think from just, he's local here, from one of the Community Boards.

Byron: Was that Rik? Possibly?

Danielle: Was it the Community Boards? It was like a neighbourhood group of, where they would just meet and discuss neighbourhood issues, like I don't think it was even as formal as a community board. And he had little fliers for people who wanted to come and chat to him. He was an elderly gentleman, I shouldn't say elderly, but you know, in the age range that was there he was probably of the upper age range that was at Occupy so I thought that was really positive too, having a range of, an open mic, if you like, where people could discuss all sorts of issues, but with a particular, I guess there was a particular bent in the atmosphere but you know the ACT guy still got his 5 minutes or 10 minutes or so, being able to talk about what he thought as well.

Byron: Some people I've spoke to have talked of sort of 'competing ideas'. Do you think it was competing ideas and competing ideologies at Occupy?

Danielle: You know I guess I don't see it like that. I see it with a big picture of people becoming aware of their circumstances and being free to discuss them in a way that's engaged. I think that's really positive. I don't have all the answers, so I would favour a situation or a circumstance where people don't come just with the answers but they come ready to discuss. And I thought that was a real, a really, you know, interesting benefit to that whole set-up was this kind of forum concept where, it was like a mini, well it was like a long conference, you know, like a long sit-in conference of ideas and discussions. I can see how people would say that, though. I just, I don't think that's what it's contributing to overall.

I think overall, the contribution that Occupy has been to Christchurch and probably internationally is this contribution to people waking up and taking stock of where things are at with our mainly Western, capitalist, secular, in a sense sometimes having a valueless society or valuing things that maybe don't really matter or don't really even make sense. So, I think that's what the contribution is too, and however people decide to deal with that will be really interesting to see, but I think a lot of young people, a lot of people that maybe even were more conservative and didn't want to sit in a tent or, you know, hang out there, but were so pleased. Like I know my kids' kind of ex-socialist grandparents were really stoked, they're not gonna show up to a protest anymore but they

were just like 'oh this is great to see', you know, a lot of people were really thrilled and relieved, I think, that there was activity going on. I hope that it isn't just like a valve that let off steam and everything goes back to normal, but that people continue on that journey of questioning how things are in their lives, cause I think it does come down to your own life, how you're living and the kinds of communities you chose to align with or be in partnership with in your life, so that's, yeah, and I guess that comes back to those activists that I've really admired over the years were people who let it really affect their life and made substantial choices, to live quite differently with their families through that process so that inspires me.

It's kind of an on-going journey of figuring out what the priorities are for each generation, though, I think. And so our generation, yeah there's a whole lot of competing priorities for attention, that's for sure, in terms of any valid waking up to the status, to what is going on, or just numbing out with television or food or other substances that might keep us quiet, yeah, but I think that it was a really significant awakening point for people.

Byron: How do you think that awakening has changed Christchurch or has changed Aotearoa following Occupy?

Danielle: That will be really interesting. I think Christchurch; I don't think any one thing changes anything. I think things joined up change things and I think Occupy is part of, in Christchurch, a really interesting bunch of things that have been happening after the 'quakes, that kind of relate although I don't know them all and they're all sort of slightly separate but I think that Occupy occupied a part of the centre of town and even though it was in the outskirts it was in the closest you could get to the centre of what had been the centre of town, and was no longer. It was cool. Gap filler, things like that that had been going on in Christchurch that were changing spaces, occupying spaces that had fallen vacant or had been disused or were traumatised post 'quake as well. It kind of changed people's awareness of what's possible, if you like. So I think there's this, in general in Christchurch, even though people are disheartened and there's still a lot of people who haven't had their claims met who are really struggling to find accommodation 'cause rental prices are just through the roof, let alone buying your own home for the privileged few, you know. There is a whole lot of problems that are going on in Christchurch, but I think there is, there was a sense of hope with Occupy and a sense of possibility, and those things I think Christchurch needed at that time, but still needs, and has had an experience of through things like occupy, through gap filler, through some of the arts that have gone on, kind of, through the centre of town, and maybe even with the new council, who knows.

Yeah, I mean I have some renewed sense of possibility with our local politicians just at the moment and, you know, I think having been through a lot, Christchurch young people, I'm just going back to the young group of pacific people I'm thinking of: PYLAT I just think a whole lot of circumstances combined to provide, yeah, significant opportunity for waking up to this population of Christchurch but particularly young people in Christchurch. If they choose to they have some opportunity to right now, because there's been a few things that have gone on that could provide that kind of connectivity and community, and some of its online too, yeah.

Byron: So you've already talked about it a bit, but how do you think that the circumstances Christchurch was in being very soon after these significant earthquakes, how did that make

Occupy Christchurch different than Occupy in other cities in the country or overseas?

Danielle: I don't, yeah. Maybe I'll answer this more personally because I don't know what the analysis will be like in say, 20 year's time of the period of the 'quakes and what's happened to Christchurch in terms of how all of that has significantly affected us all. But I do think it literally cracked us open and for Christchurch communities, for myself particularly because I can only really talk about myself when it comes down to it, the 'quakes really rocked my sense of trust and things just stay the same in nature but also in things like governments and insurance companies and city councils and in fact any other institutional body to look after me and my family when it comes down to it. It really rocked to the core.

I think that sense of trust in an outside authority to get it right unless you, and this is kind of qualified, by perhaps it takes being really engaged ongoingly in a way that's pretty frustrating and boring and no one really wants to do except maybe there is a fun way to do, and I think that was what Occupy also had, was like it kind of looked like fun like on the outside as well. I mean, I can't say I stayed the night there and I wasn't there often but I thought "well that's interesting that these people are kind of have a sort of festival approach, they kind of, it looks like a bit of hard work but also kind of enjoyable in the sense of community and camaraderie and maybe a bit of music going on and performance at times I think," so there was an appreciation of that likeness to take to politics but also yeah I think circumstances in Christchurch particularly meant that people needed an outlet for some of their frustrations around just the world was not that same, you know, and our sense of trust in the way the world works to look after us was really challenged and so I think it's really important for people to find ways to then engage to build that hope and trust back again and so occupy to me looks like part of that picture for some people that engaged and that I hope that is ongoing, that people find ways to engage that can, I guess build trust into systems or into their lives if they can't trust the system, yeah you know. So yeah.

Byron: Did you attend any of the General Assemblies at Occupy?

Danielle: I don't think I did, I think the one I attended was like a series of, it was like a workshop day, yeah I don't know what that was called.

Byron: That would have been the open air university

Danielle: Yeah, yeah, the open air university, yeah, and I think I may have attended two of those maybe, I can't quite remember but yeah the one of them one of them I was sort of speaking with my union hat on, as at that time I was Pacific rep' for the Tertiary Education Union at Canterbury and it was just about showing some sort of solidarity. I mean I did feel slightly, and this often happens to me, but you know, just, it happens because I'm aware of the privilege I have as a Pacific person with a job at a university I can sometimes get into situations where I'm the only Pacific person in that room and then you suddenly feel slightly burdened with that but I didn't let that get to me but there is an awareness that I felt like I had to show some solidarity with that hat on just for a moment and it was really interesting. I think the next guy to speak was from the Maritime Union and I think likewise, I think unions, there was a bit of union presence there and you know I think that's interesting too 'cause unions have had such a hammering it's been such a, well I'm just- I mainly know about the Tertiary Education Union. It's been a long haul for some of

those core workers in the TEU and other unions I'm sure have felt enormous pressure around the circumstance that their colleagues are facing that they've had to work hard on, so I think it's great when you see union presence there at things like you know that sort of hui, as there should be, but yeah it was nice to talk about that kind of collective solidarity voice, yeah, and around workers' rights as well

Byron: Did you feel as well, perhaps, you're in something of a privileged position compared to a lot of the people who were at Occupy as well? Given that it was attracting a lot of homeless people and so forth?

Danielle: Yeah, I mean you know, yes. But for me I'm quite comfortable with diversity in that way. It sounds like such a blaming' university answer, a privileged answer, but what it makes me think of is, well there's two parts to that. So you know it is probably important for me to acknowledge my analysis anyway of class and race and privilege and white privilege as well which I hold even though I'm brown visibly too, but my mother is Pakeha and fifth generation Irish-English farming sort of central Otago, and police on my grandfather's side. Why I mention that is just because that is the line that I access some of the resources that my family now has like a house and stuff like that and so that awareness of privilege is part of that and what that privilege is built on is mainly my grandfather's family's presence in the armed constabulary when they were in, I think possibly around the Taranaki region. We're not entirely sure, but certainly their Irishness didn't somehow inoculate them from then coming to another country and gaining privilege over the top of the indigenous people of this land. So there's that awareness, I just sort of put that in there. But then on my Samoan side, again too there's that sense of privilege coming from a family in the islands who very consciously sent their son to New Zealand to get an education. One of the privileged few who did, although certainly lots are here now, but it's still a privileged position to be in to have that expectation from, you know, generational planning to get you into a position where education is somehow part of the pathway you've accessed and are continuing to ride the wave of that privilege, I guess.

And it's particularly important to, I guess, to hold that awareness in a conversation around, you know, the 99% versus the 1% in terms of privilege and the kind of range of that analysis of class privilege and how the banking system works and rah de rah, but it's personal, as well, you know. Unless we can impact where we sit within that grand scheme, and kind of have a level of being able to make some choices around how we engage with that; whether it's thinking of ourselves as, I mean I'm choosing to position myself as privileged, even though I could potentially position myself as not-so-privileged, if I was to look at it another way. My mum was on the DPB my whole life, grew up partly in Linwood, and then moved to Fendalton you know, but I think it's useful for me, it's a political choice for me to position myself as privileged with that awareness and it helps to engage with it that way. Even though in no way am I privileged compared to the 1%, right? You know, so there's that as well and I think we can get caught up in the middle class, you know, working class discussion, when it's actually much bigger than that.

And that's kind of what I was saying before around what was new information to me over that period was just the very vast disparity between the middle class even and that top 1%. You know and just how manipulated the middle classes are also and in that sense locked away from

awareness, which if you look at it without the money factor involved but just being able to live in dignity, with your values and in a sense enlightened, in the sense that you understand the truth of your circumstances. Not necessarily a mystical experience but that you're enlightened with just what is going on around you then the middle class is also really locked away from that. They choose to be as well, but then that is part of that numbness to reality that I think Occupy is an opportunity to sort of shake that up for a variety of people, not just your middle class, but yeah maybe for those who are living on the street. They get to kind of celebrate that sense of being in existence and heard in that forum maybe that they get overlooked at other points and I thought that was pretty cool that there was this inclusivity. I don't know if that made some people uncomfortable or not, I don't know. I heard things in the media about "is it just a bunch of homeless people who are choosing to hang out in the park? How seriously can we take this group?" But for me that's always how activists have been framed anyway, you know. I remember when we protested against the Chinese President, Prime Minister; I can't remember what you call him.

Byron: President.

Danielle: President. Back in the '90s, I was hapu with my first baby and the police were really brutal with big batons and stuff. They didn't hit us, but they really pushed heavily back and chased us and there was one, that was really just 'cause one guy who, I think was a guy that lived on the street. He just decided to start a fight, he wasn't there wholly there for the politics, he just decided to start a fight, so it meant that the whole protest got kind of labelled with this one person's actions and I guess that is a danger in the media or in how you are perceived by authority. But that wasn't in our control, I think in a way that was also about the challenge to be just a bit smarter actually about how activism and particularly protest stuff can work positively, but it's never wholly in your control how it's perceived. Yeah, so.

Byron: So what did you think of the media coverage that Occupy Christchurch got?

Danielle: I remember defending you guys a little bit at work [laughs]. Thinking, I don't know, it's just that discomfort feeling like, if people knew the people who were there, they might not just write them off as a bunch of homeless group. Though there was still, there were some homeless people living there and acting as kind of, you know 'cause they're used to sleeping rough, some of those folks. So, that's pretty cool, actually, that they might wanna come and say "actually, hey, you know, this is how we hang out rough. We don't do this." I know that was going on in Wellington later on and Auckland. I'm not sure if that happened in Christchurch that there was sort of street people who were sort of semi-guardians of the site so that they would, well that's how they framed it in the media. Hey, I remember watching an article about that. So I don't know, I think the media is always interested in an angle, you know, and I thought it got a reasonable amount of positive coverage internationally and the fact that Christchurch maybe had this smaller group in compared to national. Well, in fact I don't know the numbers, so I mean it just looked in the media that it was smaller, but I think at times it was quite large and other times it was small.

So. You know, I guess if I was wholly trusting of the media I'd be like "Oh, goodness, they should've have said this, they should've have said that," but actually it wasn't a bad representation overall of the whole Occupy thing and that was pretty new. I mean, like I mentioned before with

the whole Operation 8, the whole October 15th fiasco. I mean it was so detrimental that media coverage to all activists across the country who were engaged, either with environmental activism like the Happy Valley crew here that got raided on the same day and people forget that it was lots of different activist groups who were raided that day, not just the Ureweras, but anarchist groups in Wellington and treaty activists, of course, but because I think everyone who was an activist knew at least somebody in that, involved and being raided that day, it had an enormous impact on the sense of 'how safe is it to just do what we would ordinarily do as activists'. And the media coverage was so shocking, it was just so different from how the reality seemed to people who knew those people.

Occupy's coverage was relatively good, I mean it was really quite positive. I think because there was a lot of positive international coverage. Like it was suddenly like "oh, New Zealand's joining this cool international thing," which I think in some ways served us really well, that New Zealand's kind of general lack of self-confidence and that whole looking towards the outside to see what the latest 'cool thing' is to be, served Occupy in Christchurch really well, if I'm being cynical about it. But it was, I think that works for the media story, and Christchurch didn't seem to get as, well not as bad a rap for instance as the terrorism raids, so you know yeah, in comparison it seemed relatively good.

Byron: Something you touched on a bit earlier was with, I mean Occupy had this slogan of, you know, the 99% and the 1%, which in a way can obscure that there are different levels of power and privilege within the 99%. I think in Occupy, that became quite clear around particularly gender issues towards the end of it. Do you have anything to say about that side of things?

Danielle: Yeah, what can I say about that? Well, we're in Christchurch and I don't think it's a bad thing that, well you see I don't know enough about Occupy to make this comment, but I would say, in general, when you have any active group that's involved in politics you're going to find those troubles with gender issues, race issues or you know ethnicity issues and class. That's just what you're going to find and it's not necessarily the measure of the movement overall to, sort of bring those things into questions in fact it's really healthy, because that's just about having positive relationships on the day but it's also about having a robust analysis overall.

So it's cool that the gender conversations happened, if they did happen. I'm glad I didn't have to be there. I mean know how hard that can be, that sort of work and those sort of challenges can be, especially when you really, really respect the kaupapa and you're all, in a sense, on the kaupapa but there's different levels of awareness around certain things that need to be brought up. You may not know the '90s, 'cause it's sort of a long time ago now, I can't remember how long I've known you for. I think I've known you vaguely, you know just, you were there, I think. You know, I remember your face from- but in the '90s "CORSO on Campus" was at Canterbury of University. And then we broke away from CORSO on campus because of sort of generational issues around, we were a bit younger and we wanted to say things in a younger way. Some of our guys wanted to be more, use more casual language.

I think they put up a really embarrassing flier actually, but I will get to making a point, but and so then we eventually set up our own little group called "Out of Order" for a short period of time. And then that group gradually became really difficult, really unworkable with the gender issues in

that group. Some of the guys were quite, had a different style and we just wanted to get down and do the work, so we broke off and had a women's group for about just under 10 years. Well, it's still going but we're not really active, called WEAVE. And then that group did quite focused education sort of stuff in schools, rather than doing the whole protest stuff again, 'cause we found that it became quite aggressive, you know. At time anyway, it was, you know, going up to Jenny Shipley and shoving a placard in her face or egging her car and we were just we were kind of over that style. We wanted to move into just awareness-raising of particularly nuclear issues to some, and issues in decolonisation issues in the pacific that were affecting women.

And we took a book called "Pacific Women Speak Out" around schools. But, I think that can happen, you know. It's like I'm just really illustrating that point really that it doesn't detract from the kaupapa overall but it's how people want to work and it was useful for us to be in a women's only group for a while. But I thought that was what the beauty of Occupy was actually was it was combined, it was attempting anyway to draw such a variety of people together in the task of awareness-raising rather than just direct action or aggressive protest action. It wasn't any of those things that we'd kind of gotten tired of and weren't working and certainly, any sniff of that would be really clamped down on now, post-October 15th, so yeah those things. I don't, I'm not surprised but I and I don't think it's unhealthy that they crop up as part of the discussion for any group. So, I'm pleased actually to hear that that was, yeah, that's healthy.

Byron: So did you feel quite connected to the international Occupy movement being involved just here in Christchurch?

Danielle: I think as connected as you can feel, isolated with three kids in the suburbs. I'm just being real. And working, working full time. I just think it's a moment in time that I hope we look back on and say well that's the time we noticed awareness shift around the world. That would be really cool. And if, yeah, if I was part of that time, just being alive at this time and having conversations in small way. I think that's probably what most people who were affected by Occupy in that broad sense in that broad brush sense, if they are affected by it at all, would be. I kind of just think myself as one of those not wholly detailed kind of political analysts but someone who just hopes to see positive change and people engaging with awareness of what is rather than this kind of illusion-based society that we live in a lot of time. So that'd be cool. In that sense I feel connected to the international movement

Byron: Do you have anything else you'd like to say or like to add before we end there?

Danielle: No. Not really. I guess the only other thing I'd like to just say that I often think of when confronted with, I guess, both the opportunity for change and really entrenched systemic issues that have not yet fully waivered to the point where we can make the changes that we might want to see and that's just a quote from a woman in Dunedin who I really respect and who sort of mentored me. And that's Marie Lofeso, who's the daughter of ETTY Lefeso, who is one of our foundation members for Pacifika. And she would always say to us "there's always another way. There's always another way". And I think so often we feel like there's just the way that we've always been raised to experience and the financial system is certainly one of those, but a whole lot of things are part of that too and so Occupy. Yeah, I'm stoked to have even been part of a tiny aspect of connected with it, just in that hope that people will, together, figure out what that other

way is.

Kai'ora Byron, thank you so much for interviewing me and for coming along. I really appreciated being able to be part of this story.

Poly Hart

Recorded Twenty-sixth January 2014

Byron: I'll start by asking you, how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Poly: I think I saw on Facebook the initial march when people were saying, you know, we're the 99 per-cent and I was working nearby at the time so I came down just for the tail end of the march and joined in. Then I realised people were setting up camp and stuff, and there were a few people there I knew- lots of people I didn't, but everyone seemed really friendly and I was delighted to see such a big gathering of interesting people in Christchurch at one time so I sort of hung around and went to a few meetings to find out more.

Byron: OK, so who were the people you knew? Were they people you know from, had you been involved in political activism before?

Poly: A little bit, I'd been to the odd protest much, but it was more just people I'd engaged with in a social context, like Popx, and I think I saw my friend Dean Hallowich as well, and a few, yeah, a couple of others, but there were just other really friendly people, Lucy I think as well, Lucy Matthews was the other person I knew.

Byron: So what were the meetings you went along to, after that initial march?

Poly: They were some of the general assemblies, I've always had a really strong interest in, processes, community meeting processes and how people come to a consensus and how its facilitated and all that, I like to just sort of, sit and watch, and you know, when those things work and they flow it's really cool to see, because decisions get made and things get actioned. I was quite impressed with how it ran given that for the most part it was a disparate group of people coming together, I mean there was common interest obviously, but I, you know, I appreciated it.

Byron: And did you stay at the camp there?

Poly: I did, I did, I was mostly involved with Occupy Christchurch from I guess, mid to late September through till the end of October 2011, and I was about 20 weeks pregnant at the time, but I did come along, I got really enthusiastic about it actually, and brought down lots of tents, and extra tents for other people and spare hot water bottles and things like that, I really was impressed with how, I guess there was this level of organisation where everything was quite well created, there was a lot of creative energy flowing around, you know things were pretty and I like that kind of combination, you know, sometimes it's just one or the other.

I had lots of energy, I was in my middle trimester and I suppose I should have been nesting really, rather than pouring all my energy into a camp full of hobos [laughs]. No people were lovely, I probably only stayed one or two nights, but I popped along every day and offered what I could in the way of equipment and support, and I met a lot of really interesting people through it.

Byron: So what sort of interesting people did you meet?

Poly: Ryle James, he was doing a lot of the cooking, and yeah he became quite a good friend, we stayed in touch since Occupy, Ruben Pond I remember really getting on well with, got a bunch of

faces and the names have faded away now. I was there for a good month kind of being involved and then I was up in Auckland for a while, I spent a week actually at Occupy Auckland which was quite cool, they treated me like a princess and then I came back to Occupy Christchurch and it was very different at the end, my initial experience for that first month was very positive and then it was a completely different group of people when I came back in November, and you know the equipment was all over the place and damaged, so you know, it's mixed, I learned a lot of about, I guess trust and having to be responsible for my own stuff and taking care of all that as well.

Byron: So what was it initially that made you want to come and bring all this equipment and to trust people with that, why do you think you felt that way?

Poly: I guess because it seemed really organised and together, people seemed like they were in it for the long haul, and you know there was a need for it and I knew that my family had various large tents and things like that, and I was really, I guess enchanted with the idea of setting up a massage space, setting up an office space, you know, a meeting space, and just having these, I guess kinda zones, I've been to festivals like Convergence and rainbow gatherings where people did just kind come together and create these things, and whilst the lack of clear leadership I always find a little bit scary when it's sort of this, what's the word I'm looking for? "anarchical" process where there's no sort of fixed person of authority, people did seem to be stepping into those positions at Occupy, so, I guess I just wanted to contribute and be a part of something, yeah being a part of something was a bit part of why I wanted to give to the project.

Byron: Do you think that, that sort of method where it was non-hierarchical and no leaders, did that work as a way of organising?

Poly: In the short run, and then people lost interest, wandered off and did other things, and I guess it could work if people were really clear and took responsibility for their roles and handed it over to someone else who would take of the role. I still think there needs to be a structure for that to some extent, I mean, not saying we need layers of bureaucracy, but I think there wasn't a heck of a lot of accountability really, you know, people ran off with money every now and then and you know, people could just leave and go on holiday, which was great and fine, that's what I did as well, but a lot of stuff just got left there, and it was really hard to tell, especially if it wasn't labelled whose the stuff was, you know, and whether if, even if it was labelled if it was a donation or a loan or whatever, or part of the free pile because we were doing a, what would you call it?

Byron: The really free market.

Poly: Yeah the free markets, so everything just jumbled together and shoved under canvases when it rained, and then people took their tents away so there were no tents left to store it in, so just be like a piece of tarpaulin, that was the stuff management side, and yeah I guess had there been people clearly taking responsibility for one area or another, yeah, so that lack of structure I guess fell through in that particular area, and you know in some ways it did allow a lot of flow and a lot of movement and a lot of stuff to happen in a short space of time, so there were definitely positives to it.

Byron: So what were some of the activities and events you were involved in?

Poly: Um, as far as the marches and things went, there was one about, gosh it was... I can't even remember what it was about, I know there was one where we went down to the art gallery I think, and a lot of people talked about...

Byron: Oh yes, on Labour Day

Poly: Yeah it was that one, went past the bridge of remembrance and then down to the art gallery and a lot of people spoke on the megaphone and a lot of people talked about the unemployment situation had affected them, or how, you know the job loss and the change, basically the market crash and its flow on effects. That was a really cool day actually because people spoke from the heart quite a lot, it wasn't just sob stories it was really, well this happened but this is what I've made of it. I remember one, older, elderly man, talking about, basically his life savings had vanished when one of the investment companies went down and you know, but he was trying really hard to be positive about it all, yeah just, it was touching that day.

There were other little marches and things, something about McDonalds one day, I think the way there were treating their staff, so we jumped in on that, we were outside Riccarton McDonalds for a while. I think I was more interested on the whole on how things were at the Occupy site, and tried to jump in on any art project basically, I organised a bunting making workshop, we made lots of little triangular prayer flags and sewed them on and there were, you know people we really happy to donate old fabric so we made it look a bit more pretty and festive, and planting some little pansies and things around the place as well, in Hagley Park or keeping them in little pots, that was quite fun, just doing that, yeah "how can we make it pretty" and draw people in, rather than having a kind of grungy energy, because there was that side of it as well.

Byron: Do you think it drew people in having that, having it pretty?

Poly: I think so yeah, people appreciated that, festivity and colour it was uplifting, and having music around, it was the same effect. Yeah there were people there, someone taught a dance workshop at one point I think, there was a lot of energy for that kind of thing, you know, a lot of the circus- there seemed to be a lot of fire spinners and circus people at one stage and they've got a lot of energy, they're fun, so yeah it drew them in more, and like attracts like I suppose.

Byron: And how was it different when you came back from Auckland and went to the site?

Poly: Ooh, there were a bunch of, the only people there were a bunch of men with shaved heads dressed in black, chain smoking, I was quite obviously pregnant by this stage, I would have been about 25 to 27 weeks pregnant, so quite far along, and you know, I asked them for some help with dismantling the tents and all I got were these kind of lewd comments about who'd knock me up next after I'd given birth and it was, it was pretty grotty, and you know, I just pretty much just stood up to them and said "actually look, I'm a pregnant woman, there's a tent I need to take down" marquees actually, two marquees, and you know, "I need some help with this" and then one of them pulled himself together and came and gave me a hand with the poles and the carrying and things like that.

One of the marquees was damaged and it was my fathers, so I was feeling really bad because I felt responsible for it and the people I'd kind of left it with weren't there anymore and I'd just made the

assumption that people would [be there] and that they would look after stuff and you know, so my dad was not happy.

You know, I'm not wanting to have a big whinge about it at all, because yeah, forgiving people, but it's, it was just the state of where things were at that time, it was getting closer to Christmas, it was November by then. Just trying to find my stuff and just rummaging under these damp tarpaulins for bits of my tents and you know, I think my fly had gone, so you know people just had grabbed stuff, and some of the stuff I found and it was salvageable but it was really impossible to tell what was, what was junk, you know what was donated, what people wanted to pick up later, and there was a lot of unhappiness around that, on the internet as well. You know it was unfortunate really I suppose, Yeah had there been some people- I don't know, it's like, who? Who would do it, who would be those ones to stick up? And I guess that's, if we want someone else to fix our problems, we want the one per-cent to fix our problems [Laughs] but really, we gotta do what we can for ourselves too.

Byron: Despite how that sort of ended up, were you pleased that you'd been involved?

Poly: Oh absolutely, it was over all it was a positive experience. I had a really good time, just kinda creating with people and, just feeling part of that togetherness and you know, those marches did feel quite valid and it was getting information out there and I did have a lot of conversations with people who had, I guess all sorts of things, just environmental concerns or whatever, and people who'd passed by and you know, who didn't know about these things before and I think it did broaden that net of consciousness, just awareness of where our worlds at the time, and there was also a huge current of positivity for the most part of people going "well how can we make this better" you know here are ideas, you know, people networking, you know, it really forged something together in Christchurch and that it brought together the socialists and the anarchists and the creative circus people and the hippies and the angry vegans and just all these people I guess who all knew each other to some extent but it really formed a, I wouldn't say a core network because that network doesn't really exist in the same form that it did, but it did introduce a lot people to each other and created a physical forum where people did meet and did share ideas, and a lot of people have maintained a lot of those connections as far as I'm aware, I certainly have, I made a lot of friends, so that's definitely something very tangible I feel I've gotten out of it.

And Auckland was great too, I realise this project's about Occupy Christchurch but it was very interesting seeing how they ran it compared to us, and they had a, they had quite a strong system going up there and-but yeah there was a lot of, I guess it attracted a lot energies that, needed healing I suppose, you know, people would come who had a lot of, mental health or drug issues, addiction issues should I say, and, you know God bless them, that's... we've all been in that space in one way or another I'm sure, but it, you know there was a- it needed to be managed in the sense that people needed boundaries and clarity and I think did an admirable job of that up in Auckland

Byron: So, obviously going and staying at Auckland you felt there was a real connection between the Occupies in different cities around the country?

Poly: Yeah, yeah there was a man there- man or boy, he was a bit younger than me I think, he called himself Merlin, who was making real effort to network between the Occupies and doing a

lot of Skyping and stuff with the kind of, key active people in different parts of the country and synchronising the marches and things like that, so- and there was definitely like a sense of kinship you know, when I came, rocked up there saying "hey I've just been hanging out a month with Occupy Christchurch" they're kinda like "oh welcome!" you know, so that was, that really nice actually, and yeah, just feeling friendship and stuff up there, I don't think I've stayed in touch with anyone from Auckland so much but, yeah, it was special, and there was a connection.

Byron: And did you feel as well a connection to the more global Occupy movement?

Poly: A little bit yeah, especially watching, video podcast type things of some of the marches and some of the riots as well that went down in some parts, I was really, impressed or overwhelmed perhaps by the scale of how big it was internationally, I mean, people, there are a lot of people in the public and in the media who kinda treated Occupy Christchurch or you know the New Zealand Occupies as a bit of a joke, or nuisance or whatever. It certainly got people's attention though. But just seeing how many people were in New York, or New Orleans or all these different cities, big cities where there was just masses, you know hundreds of people it was really like "wow ok, people are coming together globally for something" that's not happened before as far as I'm aware, not that level of unitedness and connectedness and I'm sure that the way you know, networks are forged between people within Occupy Christchurch and people within different New Zealand Occupy groups, I'm sure there were some international connections forged between people who were like "hey let's make something happen" so I guess with modern technology it's a lot easier to do that than it used to be and, that if people did want to organise a protest about something [its] possible.

Protest is a strong work, but you know there's positive things that we can be like "yeah lets support this" a support march I suppose, it would be pretty easy with the contacts that organised people have these days to pull together something that can happen in multiple regions if it's an idea that people really got behind so- and that probably has happened, and you know, it can keep happening.

Byron: You mentioned a bit about the media, what did you think about the media coverage of Occupy Christchurch?

Poly: To be honest I didn't read a heck of a lot about it, I mean it was only if somebody clipped out a newspaper cutting or posted it online. I think there was mixed feedback, I think we did a few press releases and they did get published as we'd written them. It kinda depended who was writing the article and what kinda slant they put in it I think.

Byron: Do you think that Occupy Christchurch changed the people that were involved?

Poly: Oh absolutely, it was an experience, you don't walk away from things unaffected, it was quite an emotional experience for me in some ways, for me, that's my personal, what I got out of it. It was just this, I guess friendship and connectivity to a level that I hadn't found before in Christchurch, I always found Christchurch very reserved and very, separate little pockets of people all cliquy all over the place and you know, this was kinda the opposite it was, people coming together, so for me personally it changed me, I can't speak for other people but I've heard people speak fondly of it.

Byron: Do you think it changed anything wider than in Christchurch or in New Zealand?

Poly: It's a little hard to say. I think did broaden people's awareness of some of the social, environmental, and political issues facing our generation. Yeah it opened my mind up a bit to what was going on a bit more I already had. Yeah I guess that goes back to changing people but did change something tangible?... Probably.

Byron: If something like that were to begin again do you think you'd get involved again?

Poly: Yes [Laughs] I think I would try to use stronger discernment about how much energy and resources I gave, you know, I think I'd give stuff not expecting it to come back necessarily and try and you know, only give stuff that I was prepared to give on that level rather than loaning stuff that belonged to my family members. You know having said I did loan all that stuff a lot of it I did get back and it was perfectly fine, like my drum was still there, my djembe drum, and you know quite a bit of stuff was perfectly undamaged, and people had looked after the musical instruments thank goodness. But yeah, I think I would, I have limited energy for it these days because I've got a child who's almost two, so it's unlikely that I'd be able to stay there several nights a week and pour my time and energy into it, I'm also quite involved in a lot of other things these days, but I'd definitely be connected with it on some level.

Byron: So what are something of the things you're involved with these days, post Occupy?

Poly: Post Occupy? well I've just moved into Beachcomber so I'm spending a lot of energy just kinda, domestically setting up, and you know, chipping away at my wild garden, and trying to make it more of a space that I want to be in, also in the wider Beachcomber space I've got a lot of ideas I guess for de-cluttering and sorting and beautifying and working in with the other women who are interested in gardening, so I guess that's become my community, and it's just, easier having it on my doorstep than going somewhere else for it. I've been quite involved in the food forest collective, and they've been, there's various permaculture projects that have been springing up or have been established for a while, and it's doing a lot of volunteer work out at Living Gardens near Governors Bay. Not sure what's happening with that piece of land at the moment but there's, met a lot of really lovely people though that as well who are quite keen on doing stuff. I'm going to a food forest hui tonight.

I've been a bit more involved with my church as well, there's a group called healing on the streets which are basically just offering prayer for healing for people it's a, a suppose it's a form of evangelism but in a rather non-invasive gentle way, which appeals to me. I've been doing quite a bit of mural work, Popx has finally persuaded me to join in on that community mural in New Brighton and I was doing a lot of that at the end of last year, one of the bubble ones and one on the side of Funky Pumpkin, so been putting a bit of energy into that, and a few other painting projects, yeah being a mum probably takes up the vast majority of my time and energy these days but that's wonderful as well.

Byron: I ask because I think part of the history as well is what people done since Occupy, and while Occupy doesn't exist almost everyone is involved in some sort of activism or involved in community projects in some way.

Poly: Yeah I think, because I wasn't really, I wasn't really involved in all that much before Occupy, I guess I've gone through a period of lower mental health prior to the Occupy thing starting, or prior to my pregnancy should I say, and once I was pregnant that was a really big motivation to pull myself out of the bit of rut that I'd been in for a couple of years, and I guess I'd kind of assumed that Christchurch was all closed and boring and there weren't any interesting people or friendly enough people or that I wasn't good enough to hang out with those people if they did exist, so that was kind of a, you know, challenge those untrue beliefs in myself and it did get me out there and connected in a way, so yeah I hadn't thought about it like that, but I suppose it was a non-scary way of becoming involved, and I have stayed involved, so yeah.

Byron: So what would be some of your best memories from that time?

Poly: Sitting in the sun after one of the protest marches, and there was kind of an informal concert going on and there open mic, and Popx and other people getting up and having a sing or a jam, I really enjoyed that side of it that day, connecting with Ryle, he, I really wanted him to make an 'Occu-Pie' so you know we got a lot of these apples and he actually made this apple pie and sort of latticed it and then wrote 'Occu-Pie' in pastry

Byron: Because he was actually a chef wasn't he?

Poly: Yeah he was doing a lot of cooking, he later actually came out and woofed, was a willing worker on an organic farm, when I was living at Gricklegrass Community and worked for us for a week or two, so yeah we've maintained those connections. Something very, that I very much appreciated was, I was quite pregnant, and was trying to get my father's garden in order, I'd sort of taken over that while I was staying with him, but I just couldn't do the physical heavy grunt stuff being pregnant and all that, so Gary, a big Maori man named Gary who'd been involved with, it wasn't Salvation Army it was some other sort of men's...

Byron: The City Mission?

Poly: City Mission that's what it was, he was a lovely man, and Ryle and they may have been someone else, I can't place who it was, but they all came over and spent an afternoon helping me out with the garden and dung down my chicken coop and did a whole bunch of weeding, and I baked them cakes, so that was a pretty cool afternoon as well, and that was a spin off of it, yeah really nice people just helping eh.

Byron: So is there anything else about Occupy that you'd like to mention?

Poly: I guess just that over all it was a positive experience, and I learned a lot from it and got a lot out of it. That's for me, and I feel like I did put into it as well, and I hope that the things I did do and was involved with, the banners and so did become, you know, were helpful to people. I've actually seen them up in a couple of peoples kitchens, Sarah and Jo have ended up with some of them now which is quite cool, that they're still making somebody smile. I think it was a real good thing, definitely.

Sionainn Byrnes

Recorded Fourteenth February 2014

Byron: I'll start by asking you how did you get involved in Occupy Christchurch?

Sionainn: I, at the time, had been following closely the Occupy movements elsewhere and was just sort of talking about them with friends and things like that and my closest friend who I went to primary school with mentioned that her other best friend from high school Regan was going to be involved in organizing a sort of small Occupy. At that stage I think it was only a protest and so everyone got really excited about that and yeah, so my feeling was that I was going to be participating in the first day of the protest and that we weren't really too sure what was going to happen after that that there were talks of setting up a wee camp and things like that.

Byron: So you were going to some of the organising meetings that happened before the...

Sionainn: Largely my involvement was over Facebook at that stage, I met Regan and started discussing things with him online, just in the lead up to that, and it was sort of about who we might like to talk to beforehand and I got really excited about perhaps this being a good way for us to start some public lectures and things like that, that's what I'm really interested in. So I spoke to him about various different things we might be able to do throughout the community as a result of this like meeting of people because I hadn't really, the only protest that I had been to before that really was to do with like the Iraq sort of, the coalition going into Iraq, and that was ages ago so we, yeah, didn't have a huge idea of what we might be doing afterwards, but, you know, just talking about that sort of stuff

Byron: So you went along on the first day?

Sionainn: Yep, yeah so I went with four other people, close friends of mine. We turned up, it was meant to start at a certain time in the morning and we turned up and there was no one there and we weren't really sure what was gonna happen, there was a couple of people milling about by trees and stuff, but we just, you know we were like 'we'll just wait and see how it goes'. People had talked about there being a, like, poster or placard-making period before the actual protest, but then as people started filing in there were, you know, a couple of tents, lots of people had brought heaps of cardboard and we had as well and paints and things like that and the big Occupy sign and stuff that went up and so people just generally started talking and kind of mingling. We didn't know heaps of people there at that stage. Yeah, just started making posters and stuff, yeah, to be able to take on the march

Byron: Great. And then the march happened of course.

Sionainn: Yup, yeah, so we marched right up along Riccarton road past Westfield and up to the wee park. There was a little bit of opposition from people in the street, I remember it being actually a little bit fiery at some points, and, yeah, we spent a lot of time at the wee fountain and garden etc yeah. So yeah, I don't know what [laughs, trails off]

Byron: And you returned to Hagley Park at the end of it?

Sionainn: Yep.

Byron: And so what happened next? This first protest that happened...

Sionainn: So we were really like charged up by that, it was really good, you know, a lot of us were feeling kind of weird though 'cause I think for me I did get a really big sense of there being quite a bit of conflict throughout that. When we were walking back down Riccarton road and we decided to walk through Westfield to be a little bit more visible to some of the people there and we were being heckled a lot and a friend of mine and myself as well sort of were getting shoved by just people who were on the road and really angry that we were there. But we went back and it was sort of quite relaxed, people just sort of split up into wee groups and started discussing what they thought about things, what they thought about, you know, local democracy in Christchurch and that was a really big kind of topic for discussion and just as the evening went on I think people just, yeah, were sort of trying to work out what they might do and what was the purpose was going to be. I can't remember, it might of been before the march actually that we had a lot of the open mic' stuff, and that was kinda interesting. There was a bit of a presence from the young's Nats, and young ACT which was a bit interesting as well, and I think they sort of cleared off not long after the march and stuff, so. Yeah, they just sort of hung around for a bit. But it wasn't, like it was really relaxed, and sort of just like a family picnic or something really.

Byron: And did you stay there that first night?

Sionainn: I didn't stay any of the nights. I didn't really, at the time, feel super comfortable doing it. That's just not really because it had anything to do with the Occupy movement or anything like that. I just sort of didn't know how I felt about it and because I didn't know heaps of people at the time, as well, that's probably not a good excuse because the whole point of it was to meet other people but I just went back during the days when I could. I had a really busy work schedule as well, so I had had to take the day off for the march and yeah, I maintained a lot of contact with people online as well and tried to get involved in helping organise other offshoot kind of community-event-type things, yeah.

Byron: So what was some of those offshoots you helped to organise?

Sionainn: So we tried to get, largely it wasn't that successful actually, there were a lot of the groups at the original march like sort of community and neighbour-y type groups, you know, so we tried to hook into their networks and get small, kind of, local community-type discussions going about things that were happening in Christchurch mostly. We also talked about having maybe panel discussions with people from the council etc 'cause it - I mean the Occupy movement here really got morphed into something, it was a way of expressing dissatisfaction with our council post-earthquake so, I think a lot of the original occupy message got lost and it kind of got subsumed into that, which was good and bad, but yeah, we found that it was quite hard to get anyone who would want to be involved with that from an institutional kind of view like there were people who wanted to do it and who wanted to attend and ask questions and things but we didn't really get any responders from local council and things like that. Yeah.

Byron: So while you weren't staying there, you would have come and visited the site, pretty often. What sort of things were going on when you visited?

Sionainn: People were generally just kind of workshop-ing ideas. I think there were kind of nominal themes for discussions, you know, so people were able to- there was actually quite good organisation around that too because if there was something you were particularly interested in you were able to kind of anticipate that and be there, so that you could be involved with those kind

of discussions. Throughout my involvement it was sort of just, yeah, a lot of talk and a lot of fire poi and things like that you know. A friend of mine who originally introduced me to Regan, she stayed a couple of nights and I talked a lot with her about what was happening, and sort of she began to feel slightly uncomfortable with the actual staying over part of the Occupy thing. I think a lot of the females who were interested in staying did at that point, so we sort of, yeah, stopped kind of basing our involvement around the actual site and just continued to maintain the networks with people and try and organise other things and also get involved in some of the groups that were present, so that was pretty cool.

Byron: So, as well as the workshops and things that were happening, did you attend any more protests or anything?

Sionainn: I didn't. I wasn't really aware there were any major protests or anything like that bar ones that had to do with sort of the treatment of people in red zoned areas and things like that became sort of offshoots of it. I would of been really interested in maintaining some of the more sort of political aspirations of, that were kind of present in the first march, but I don't know whether that was because I missed it or what, but like I said a lot of the things that were like big events were on weekends and I found it really hard to consecutively take weekends off from my work so I had to sort of go when I could and that was usually during the week days and around Uni.

Byron: So how long did you keep visiting the site for?

Sionainn: Probably really I stopped at about the end of the week, the first week. So I had a short involvement at the actual site. For me the most important thing was, I guess at that time I was really interested in the capacity for Occupy to open up a dialogue about these sort of like critiques of capitalism and things like that and I didn't necessarily think at that time, I'm not sure how it changed, that being at the site was the most effective way of doing that. So we tried, I think for me it was just really useful meeting up with lots of other people who had similar ideas and that's kind of the stage of which I began to meet people who are now heavily involved in the Mana offshoot of, the Christchurch offshoot of Mana and things like that. So when these sort of like ideas started to form in young people's minds about what potentially we might be able to do. Yeah.

Byron: So do you think those sort of, those networks built from Occupy have remained?

Sionainn : Yeah I do. I think for me the original Occupy protest was really successful, but the movement after that, or the sort of actual occupation of Hagley Park didn't do a lot, it was really easy to ignore, partly because of where it was. We are not really a city that's planned around having kind of a place like that, you know, it wasn't necessarily the most visible and also because at the time I think the cooperation of like the police and council and things, which was kind of, I don't know, a little bit, not suspect but, you know, they were doing it for their own reasons, kind of letting Occupy be there, so it didn't really have a chance to be anything really challenging. But that is where people of our generation were able to meet and those other relationships that are now I think are having quite a big impact on local politics and on student mobilization now, which is getting quite big at Canterbury I know and it's taken some time but it's those original relationships that came from Occupy that are now, yeah starting to actually have tangible, kind of like, effects and consequences on the way that we kind of work our communities and stuff.

Byron Do you think that Occupy sort of changed the people who were involved?

Sionainn: I don't know if it changed people. I think it was really good for kind of helping people to make sense of, or express things, that they already felt that might of been kind of like nebulous, kind of these ideas that weren't really coherent and this was the first kind of platform that we saw like the rhetoric that's still being used, like the 99%, you know that sort of stuff, that wasn't really like accessible or well known stuff, it really did democratise it for people who weren't part of the Uni or whatever and that's what I think was really good about it, but I don't know if it changed the people so much. Maybe...

Byron More of just able to make those ideas coherent and more among the group of people and...

Sionainn: yeah, yeah, exactly and I think it was really good especially in the sense that it was also criticised, it was quite good for teaching people of our age, of my age sort of specifically but you know there were older and younger people there as well. But for people my age about how you might actually feasibly be able to work with existing institutions and stuff or what are the best ways of going about kind of actually, or actualising some of this stuff that you want to see.

Byron: And do you think that you feel that today which is more than sort of two years since the movement was happening, do you think that there's that lasting influence there?

Sionainn: I do and I think a lot of that is because at the time people in Christchurch specifically were exhausted, they were so, you know, I know for myself I was constantly moving house. I had one flat that was destroyed in the wake of the earthquake and things like that and I think, I think I'm getting this right, [laughs] yeah people were just like not really in a position to be able to do much with that information maybe, and it's now that people are starting to be more future, kind of, minded, more forward thinking about where we are actually going to go from here, in Christchurch and in our country and then in regards to the rest of the world that's it's actually becoming useful.

Byron: So you talked about a lot of the local stuff happening. Did you feel that being part of Occupy, did you feel connected to the Occupy movement around the country and the global sort of movement with Occupy Wall Street?

Sionainn: I felt much more connected to the Occupy Wall Street stuff which seems odd I don't, I wasn't really involved in any of the sort of networking between Christchurch and Auckland or Wellington for example. And I think we were set apart in that because there was a bit of tension to do with what Christchurch's movement actually meant and what people were trying to do, so it was a little bit different, but I certainly, I was really, I don't know, there was a level of passion in trying to actively pursue information to do with the global Occupy movement and things that I might not otherwise have really learnt about and things like that.

Byron: Do you feel you learnt a lot from being involved in Occupy?

Sionainn: Yeah I definitely did. It was great too 'cause at the time I was finishing my undergrad Degree which was in Pols and English and I hadn't really had, like there had been talk about things like this kind of Occupy stuff that was starting to form in my classes, but it provided a really different and really valuable kind of set of values and things like that to what I had been learning. So I think it supplemented the way that I viewed my whole degree and my whole idea about politics and stuff.

Byron: Interesting. Do you think if something like Occupy were to happen again you would get

involved?

Sionainn: Yeah I think I'd be much more heavily involved now than I was at the time. Especially I think because for me a lot of my ideas about why we're in, living in the kind of structures that we are, have been formed, yeah, they've been solidified a lot more. So I feel like I have a better understanding of like this overarching structure of ideas and systems and things that I don't like and how I might be able to actually actively do something about that.

Byron: So what would you do differently if it was happening again?

Sionainn: I think it's really hard because at the time it wasn't necessarily the fault of the people organising the Occupy thing, or anything like that, I don't think the level of reception had much to do with the organisation really. I mean towards the end probably, when it started to become a little unsafe, the whole area and things like that, and that's my actual- that's my kind of perception of it as well as I wasn't actually there at the end so I don't *know* how unsafe it was, that's what I did here. I think timing would make it something like that more effective now. People have more, especially in Christchurch, more energy to be able to do stuff and are a little bit more politically versed out of necessity so I think things would be more effective now.

Byron: Is there anything else that you haven't talked about yet that you would like to mention?

Sionainn: I guess, I don't know, when you mentioned that people have been talking about stuff that they have been doing now that have roots in Occupy. For me and a lot of the people that I've been working with recently, and organising the FemSoc [Feminist Society] at Canterbury, like these are the same networks largely that came out of that and the kind of ideas as well so it's pretty cool there's a lot of this like social justice stuff going on at Canterbury, FemSoc is one part of that, and I think as well the Marxist Society and stuff so these groups that are really committed to kind of having open discussions about alternatives to capitalism and how to better make use of our democracy and how to better represent people who maybe have not been so well represented by the systems we have now and by the kind of organisations, even Occupy is that kind of method of organisation has been really good at representing some people, but maybe not at others, so it's about working out compatible ways of doing that.

Byron: Just on that note, how did you feel about sort of the way Occupy was organised and the sort of leaderless structure that it had where...what were your thoughts on that?

Sionainn: I really, I liked the idea that it wasn't spearheaded by any sort of one particular person or one particular group. And that's something that you can see now in the organisation of these societies that I just mentioned as well which are adopting really like lateral kind of hierarchies. They don't have like, you know, people in charge or things like that so that's been a lasting idea. I think it was difficult because of the sense of anonymity as well. It was hard to know who you might be able to go to, especially in the early days, to kind of speak to a wider crowd or that it was hard to, yeah, I don't know, it was, there were times of feeling a little bit isolated because of it. But I liked the idea. It was also kind of safeguarding people as well, from being held accountable for anything that might go wrong, which was good. And also like symbolically it's, the movement wasn't about an actual answer to the question of capitalism, it wasn't about a party line or something like that, so it would not really have made sense to have a group of people with a specific ideology who were running the protests and the camps. It was definitely, I think, that's the thing, all these ideas were really, I don't know, not presupposed too much about it. People had

ideas about what were good ways for us to move forward, but it was a really open discussion and also, yeah, it was just, no one kind of had the pretence of having an answer, so it needed to be really inclusive, yeah. So I think that was good.

Byron: And you think, you feel it was inclusive? In practice?

Sionainn: I do. I feel like at the start definitely, especially on the original protest day, like that was really cool. The open mic' that they had before the march, I mean that lasted for ages, way longer than I thought it was gonna because so many people were coming up and being able to talk. I just, I really liked that.

Audio recordings of the interviews featured in this book are available for streaming or download at <https://archive.org/details/OccupyChristchurch>



[1] Arundhati Roy. We are all Occupiers. The Guardian. 2011-11-17.
URL:<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/nov/17/we-are-all-occupiers-arundhati-roy> Accessed: 2016-03-28. (Archived by WebCite® at <http://www.webcitation.org/6gMGXJ6bL>)

[2] The name given by Occupy Christchurch activists to the corner of Hagley Park where the campsite was set up