

Start of interview - John

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*Int.* Ok so let's start with your personal history. If you just tell me a little bit about yourself.

John Ok ah in what way?

*Int.* Your childhood, where you were brought up

John Um I was born in a small very dull town down in South Island. Um and kind of most of my childhood my childhood was yeah South Island, small towns, [towns], places like that. And then high school went to [city] and then lived there until about ah sixteen years ago. So I did high school and most of my adult, well, half my adult life in [city] before coming to [city]. Um and so animal rights and vegetarianism was not something that I we never we didn't know it existed. It wasn't anything to do with family or anything like that

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Yeah um so it was a very not um small small minded conservative kind of life. Yeah not political in any way, just small minded. Like just just um what's the word? Um yeah conservative, nothing exciting. There was no yeah there was no new ideas, it was kind of school and high school and stuff was very straight and you know um boring, that kind of thing yeah.

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*Int.* Were you exposed to animals?

John Ah, not really. I mean we always had a cat and um I suppose my some of my aunties and uncles lived on farms and were involved in um you know, one relative worked in a slaughterhouse. Um another auntie and uncle

had a sheep farm. So I kind of was around that as a kid, not in a, not all the time, but that was just normal yeah, I suppose that's typical for a South Island, kind of, even if you're in a town, you'll know people. But I wasn't a farm kid, yeah.

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*Int. What about the relationships between you and your parents, or did you have any siblings?*

John Um, yep yep um got one brother and two sisters. And mum and dad are still together and live in [city] still, and all of the rest of them live in [city] or South Island. I'm the only North Islander um in the family pretty much.

*Int. Do you keep in touch with them?*

John Yep. Yeah um probably more so recently since they've started having kids. Nieces and nephews and stuff like that. But when I was when I first got into animal rights, yeah I didn't actually keep in touch that much. Cause I was family was boring and I was radical. I didn't really have that much, I kind of rebelled against them kind of thing, yeah. But now I appreciate them more, you know um

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*Int. So you're, would you say you're close to them now?*

John Um yeah closer than I was. I think in a lot of ways I um, when I left home, it was um it was kind of freedom to get away from the family, and got into all these new ideas and kind of and animal rights and vegetarianism was one of those things. But also just everything else. Music whatever, the social scene was quite different. So I kind of, I suppose I was sniffled by small town conservatism yeah.

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*Int. Is there anything else you would like to talk about in terms of your personal history?*

John Um yeah just before I got into animal rights? No I think I think that's it kind of yeah, small town conservative and ideas like vegetarianism like never occurred to anyone in my family or my background, people I grew up with at school. Like I didn't know any vegetarians or anyone different yeah yeah.

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*Int. So at what age did you, you first got exposed to the idea of vegetarianism and animal rights?*

John Um first was nineteen eighty six and

*Int. How old were you then?*

John I was eighteen so I was seventh form at school um and a friend um got me into a band called the Smiths. Yep and I think I got into all sorts of music alternative music and stuff and um worked at a student radio station and that kind of opened up the world of all sorts of different ideas that, for me, that was when my adult life started, when I started getting into that kind of stuff

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And started meeting more interesting people and the thing was that their music, that band, was my favourite band, and they they were vegetarians and sung about vegetarianism and animal rights. And that was my first kind of contact with those ideas yep.

*Int. So describe to me in your own words, from what you can remember, your first, when you first encountered it how you felt.*

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John        Um I think I've, it's hard to remember what I felt, I remember thinking like I got into those ideas cause of that band and I remember thinking that it was logical. Like yeah, the idea that you didn't need to eat animals and that if you eat animals you're causing pain and death, it just struck me as very logical. And I was kind of annoyed that no one had told me that like it never had occurred to me before. Um and there was no reason not to be vegetarian. You know it's kind of like on one hand, huge amounts of animals suffer and that other hand, I like the taste of meat. So for me it was, and I didn't go vegetarian straight away but that was the argument. It was the argument for eating meat seemed to be rubbish

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Like I mean no I never made those arguments cause I never thought about it but once I got that idea in my head it was obvious that I was gonna be vegetarian. And I didn't turn vegetarian straight away but I knew I would, as soon as I heard those ideas I knew that eventually I would, yeah. And um cause I still lived at home and mum did all the cooking and all that kind of stuff but I always knew, as soon as I heard those ideas that they were logical. Um and it was only a couple of years later when I moved out of home that I turned vegetarian and that was again, one of my flat mates said, aren't you vegetarian? And I was like, I suppose I am. You know it was because I always thought I would be and then once I was out of home, I had no excuse not to be. So it wasn't um, the idea was in my head before I turned vegetarian, if that makes sense

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It was just like as soon as I heard that idea of vegetarianism I knew, it was logical. And then a couple of years later I turned vegetarian. Yeah.

*Int. Is that why you would, you didn't reject it when you had that idea for the first time, cause some people reject it*

John Yeah no I never rejected it. It was, I'd never been exposed to it before and as soon as I heard, and it was this band, and I read interviews with the singer and everything like that, and talking about vegetarianism. And then soon after that I met um a guy from [animal welfare organisation], just in town handing out leaflets and stuff, and it was always, of course this is a good idea. So yeah I never rejected it

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I didn't adopt it either but I always knew from day one that that was the right argument. So I was never one of those people who was anti-vegetarian, I just it just never um, never thought about it. And as soon as I thought about it it was obvious yeah

*Int. Talk to me a little bit more about, so you had that idea but you were still living at home but your mother was in charge of the cooking?*

John Yeah um it was it wasn't that she was in charge, it was just that I was a lazy boy. So it wasn't, it was just kind of, oh I should be, I'll be vegetarian one day but I never actually did anything about it. Um cause I was kind of lazy and then when I moved out of home, a flat mate in my first flat, there was a flat mate who was vegetarian and she was kind of surprised that I wasn't

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And I kind of realised that I was surprised that I wasn't. Um and then kind of I didn't have any excuse. But it was literally like that, I didn't have any excuse not to be vegetarian, it wasn't like it was just laziness, I always thought that I would be vegetarian. And now I suppose I am and I'm living in a flat. Because she was vegetarian, I thought oh good I'll cook with her.

You know um so that kind of and in some ways I think that made me stick with it. Cause I know other people who've you know, turned vegetarian or vegan cause it's kind of a trend or something and then they drop out of it. But for me it was always just, as soon as I heard that idea, that the idea of vegetarianism, as soon as I'd heard that, I knew I'd be one

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Um and then ah when I was flatting, I run out of reasons not to be. You know, so no one had to convince me, it was the other way around. Yeah if that makes sense.

*Int. Yeah. I just want to get a few words on how, so you felt it was logical, but why? Can you elaborate on that?*

John Because of animal suffering. Like it's kinda like animals dying horribly in slaughterhouses um and for us to eat, and we don't need to eat them, and we shouldn't eat them. And for me that was the argument. There was, I was convinced. There was no big ideas or thinking or philosophy. There was just seemed very logical, obvious thing to do. Um and as soon as I heard, as soon as I heard, as soon as I became aware of the idea of vegetarianism

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I knew I'd be one just cause it was, it seemed common sense. Yeah.

*Int. Ok. So here you are now vegetarian, in a vegetarian flat, with a vegetarian flat mate, how did were you first introduced to animal rights? Like where was the transition from not just not eating meat to actually being more active as well?*

John Um I think it was part of the idea cause I was always, at that time, I was very rebellious and got involved in other kind of politics as well. Um and this band, the Smiths, you know, when they didn't talk about

vegetarianism, they'd talk about animal rights as well. And they were quite militant, in their words anyway. You know they said, like I'd read the interviews, and they were they were supportive of of direct action against animal abuse and quite angry.

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Um so and I met some people from [animal welfare organisation], one guy in particular, um and he was always very active around town handing out leaflets, and he was into the Smiths as well you see. So um and then I got involved in [animal welfare organisation], um and I can't remember, what was the original question? How did I?

*Int. How did you get to that transition from just not eating meeting to being active in animal rights?*

John Right um I think all of this happened at the same time so I think I just, like it seemed to me obvious that it's not enough for me just to not to eat meat, I have to get involved in stopping cruelty

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Cause it was, to me, it was so obvious, you know, once I heard this idea and I thought, why did no one tell me this? So I thought, I better go tell other people. So I got involved in [animal welfare organisation] and other groups and it just seemed at the time, just a natural kind of thing that and then I think I got invited to a protest and stuff like that. And kind of it went from there. But it was always, activism was always um part of the argument of, it was always um, the same thing. Yeah it wasn't ever that I was vegetarian and wasn't gonna do anything more. Yeah, mmm.

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*Int. So, would you be ok to talk to me about your first direct action for animals?*

John           Yep. Um, I'm just trying to think when

*Int.           One that was significant to you maybe or in the very beginning?*

John           Ok um. There was the first one that I got arrested for, I'm trying to think if there's anything significant before that, protest wise or anything. No I can't think, it might come back to me.

*Int.           No that's fine, if it comes back to you, we can talk about it.*

John           But um probably the first illegal direct action um was um quite, oh I suppose from the very early on, as soon as I heard about it, through being involved with [animal welfare organisation] and activism and that, as soon as I, and reading magazines, as soon as I heard about the idea of illegal direct action

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I knew I supported it but again it was just seeing common sense. There was no there was no debate in my head. Like I heard about people who were going out breaking the law for animal rights and I thought, oh that's a good idea. You know so I didn't have a moral dilemma or anything, it was just obvious. Um and I think I started doing a magazine, cause at that time, this is before the Internet was invented, everyone did little magazines. So I started doing a little magazine about animal rights and I distributed it and it was, I remember at the time, there was there was another magazine that stopped, that was, it was doing militant animal rights, and stopped. And there was no outlet for kind of, [animal welfare organisation] did their thing, but the more radical people didn't have a magazine. So I started doing a magazine and a few other people did as well

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Um and we all did little magazines and passed them around and stuff. Um but the first thing that I was arrested for was a hunting shop in ah [city], so my home town, in brackets. Um and it was a friend and I had, and the thing the thing about it was that someone had already um spray painted this hunting shop with slogans and stuff, anti-hunting slogans. Um and the hunting shop owner had, I think someone wrote, stop killing ducks on the side of the shop, and the hunting shop owner thinking he was very witty, um painted out stop and ing, so it said, kill ducks

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And we just saw this and thought right, we're gonna have to repair that. And that was the thing kind of we thought, right we're gonna go and um re-paint that side and do some damage as well. Cause we thought he's being a smart ass and he thought he's being witty, we're gonna make him pay. And so we, we saw that and we thought about it, got some paint and some slingshots, and we're gonna fire his windows out, and we went back to the shop and we smashed it up. And we re-painted that sign, so it said, stop killing ducks. Um and but the problem was, it's a gun shop, so it was alarmed straight to the police station and all the rest of it.

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Um so we didn't really think of that. I mean we we took basic precautions, we were, we thought we were being pretty sneaky um but as we wondered off, the police had an alarm straight to the police station and when the windows broke. Um so they put a cordon around the area and with guns, and they just came in, and we were in the cordon and um yeah and we kind of noticed, I think we noticed this security patrol and we thought, shit you're on to us. And we were kind of talking about, ok what are we going to do, and we decided, we're better to split up and just as we were gonna split up, we heard a car coming up behind us, and we looked around and it was a cop

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And the scary thing was, he didn't rush out and grab us, he hid behind his car door, and we realised he thought we had guns cause it was a gun shop. They didn't really know what they were reacting to and then we realised that's what he thought. And then we realised he had a gun. So we were putting our hands up and stuff, just like in the movies. And it was kind of weird, cause it was, we weren't scared, it was just cause it wasn't you know, we were expecting maybe to get arrested but we weren't expecting to have guns pointed at us. And so we kind of just put our hands up and, wow this is really weird. And then when they realised that we didn't have guns and in fact we had spray cans, they relaxed totally and started treating us like we thought. Which was, under arrest and all the rest of it

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So that was my first arrest for animal rights, yeah. Um, what was the question again?

*Int. So that was your first arrest. How did it progress from that? Did you have experiences of liberating animals for example?*

John Ah, yes

*Int. Can you describe your first one for me, or one of your earlier ones?*

John Yep yep. Ok um as a result of that first arrest, that was in '96, um we got convicted of that and we did some interviews in a magazine in ah [magazine], so national magazine

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interviewed us, it was in the paper and everything, and we kind of became spokespeople for, this is me and my co-defendant, became spokespeople

for illegal direct action for a while. Because we were the only people who were convicted and we could speak. So we ended up doing that for a while. And then um it's a bit of a long story but after that, we were known to the police. So we were, we found out, like my co-defendant got his house raided, the police were looking at me and we were getting a lot of attention, so we couldn't really do any illegal stuff. And at the same time, there was quite a few people, because of these magazines I've been doing, there's quite a few people started talking the need for a new group.

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Because other than the mainstream groups there was a lot of radical stuff happening, and at the same time, I think a couple of months after we got arrested, um a group of friends of ours in another town um chained themselves to the office of a vivisector at [city] School of Medicine. Um, and they got arrested for that. So there's us getting arrested for hunting shop and them chaining themselves. And all of a sudden there was a kind of mood, so we formed all these new groups. And so me and my co-defendant ended up being in a group um, a local grass roots radical group here.

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Um cause by this time I moved to [city], just after that. Um and we ended up doing that for quite a few years and we were public campaigning so we chained ourselves to things and blockaded doorways and got arrested a lot but not for underground stuff, it was more just protests and climbing on roofs and dropping banners. We did all of that for a few years. Um and then and then the whole movement kind of changed. We started focusing on factory farming. Um because in those years of getting arrested we got arrested for like ten different issues a week. You know it was, we were just running around, we didn't have much focus

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And we were getting a bit older and started getting more strategic. And we decided to focus on factory farming and at the same time there's a big public outcry against factory farming all starting to happen. So we started focusing more on that as an issue and being more strategic. And then one of the things we looked at overseas groups um, that were doing open rescues and stuff, and we decided, and we'd done a few, in our local group, we tried to do a bit of filming inside factory farms. We were never really organised and we never really got very good at it. Um but then we decided to do open rescue. Um and I think that was the, actually it wasn't the first time I'd done a rescue

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Like we'd, there was a few little rescues that weren't particularly open but um but this one was um, we decided to deliberately organise open rescue um and we got a bunch of people together and went to a factory farm in [town], which is about an hour north of here. Um and we, we actually went a couple of times to check it out cause we wanted to do a very public action and sorry one of the reasons we did this is cause I always felt like my conviction for the hunting shop was kind of a bit useless. Like my notoriety as the person who smashed up a hunting shop wasn't actually that useful with the factory farming campaign and everything like that. And I kinda thought you know, we need to do an open rescue and we need to force a court case

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And it was a very deliberate thing, for me anyway, it was to do an open rescue, demand to get arrested and fight it through the courts, and lose as it happened but that wasn't the plan. But um so we went um, went to this farm. It was just me and one other person, checked it out a couple of

times, filmed inside it um and stole some chickens as we were checking out. And those ones weren't public, it came out later. We, every time we went in, we'd grab as many chickens as we could. Um, which was only three or four each time I think. And we did that over the course of a couple of months and then we did this action where we got ten people from around the country to come and did the very public rescue which was, ten of us went in um, did a lot of filming. Rescued twenty hens um, took them out, got them all to safe homes. And then the next day put out a media release and

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um me and one other person went on TV and said, yes we did this, yes we broke the law, because this law is wrong, and here's film footage of us and we you know, we committed a burglary. Um, and invited them to arrest us. Ah so that was my first big rescue um and then they didn't arrest us. Not then. Um, and then it just went all quiet for a while. And then like six weeks later ah the police turned up at my house with a search warrant saying they're looking for stolen chickens, and obviously the chickens weren't there. Um but they did go through the house and um take my camera, video camera and anything to do with animal rights. Pretty much anything to do with animal rights which was like quite a lot of my stuff they took. So books and everything like that

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Um and then they raided the office of our animal rights group as well. And took all the stuff like computers, and mailing lists and all the rest of it. Um, but still didn't arrest me. And it was only six months after the actual rescue that they decided to charge me. And then I was charged with burglary, not with theft, cause they couldn't find the chickens but they could find evidence of me going into that farm, and talking about taking chickens so I got done for burglary. And it took another eighteen months of court and

then I was convicted. And I defended myself which was fun but I lost. Um and that was a political decision. Cause I knew I was guilty as hell um so I kind of thought, well I'll defend myself cause so I can talk about why I did it

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Um so and then I got convicted of burglary so that, and and in the meantime even before that, we were carrying on doing investigations and open rescues and stuff. Ah and we got better and better at it. Like we were um, there's a few of us now that are quite good at. But we didn't so much do rescues, it was just doing the investigations cause we thought that was um, less of a risk. Cause the whole getting arrested thing took two years of my time. Um and we ended up figuring out that we could have just as much effect as far as media just by doing investigations. And there's still debate about that in the movement cause obviously the other thing with rescues, you get chickens out and save their lives um which doesn't happen so much in investigations

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Although a lot of people will grab a few chickens on their way out. Chickens go missing. Yeah so that was my first actual animal liberation or not the first but one of early biggest impact ones. Like in the lead up to that we took a few chickens and stuff yeah. And I think it was the first, I maybe been inside a battery farm only once or twice before then. Um yeah so that was a first occasion when I was inside a factory farm quite a lot. Like leading up to that we were going in and out of that one farm several times and filming and stuff yeah.

*Int. Describe your feelings to me when you were in the farm*

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John

Um in the farm, I'd seen I'd seen film footage before, mostly from overseas and I'd been in a couple of farms but mostly in a rush. Just say in a protest, you kind of rush in and have a look and you rush away again cause you're being chased by the farmer or the police or whatever. And this one was the first one that I'd been in properly with a bit of time. We were in at night um and it was actually um this particular farm we could turn the lights on. So we were in for like half an hour or an hour each time, and we could turn the lights on, have a good look around. Cause we were planning a rescue and it was the first time we were actually in there concentrating and looking around. And it was a it was a big farm. Um and ah um it had a I think it had a hundred thousand chickens in this section we were in

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Ah and the shed we were in was a they were eighteen months old, they were kind of approaching what they call 'end of lay'. So at the end of their laying period they had they had no fears, they were all bald and some of them were dead and stuff. And it was kind of really, it was the first time I got that, really got the idea of the cruelty of factory farming. And and the massive scale of it. Like it was huge and and the other thing you don't see from films is the noise and the smell. And it's just, it's quite overwhelming when you're in there, especially when you've got a bit of time and you're kind of looking around and you're um you don't have to, like if you're in there on a mission filming or something like that, you're often concentrating on what you're doing. But when we went into this farm to prepare for the rescue, we spent quite a bit of time in there

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And often we'd finish our job, we had time to kind of absorb it all and that was, that's when you realise how big and awful it is. Yeah it's just the big, just the scale of it and then you go down and you get your little camera

and you film or rescue a couple of chickens. Um and it's kind of weird because you're focusing on one or two chickens and you get them out and you look around and there's a hundred thousand more you know. Um but and those chickens came out and then you drive home with them for a couple of hours and then you're kept overnight wherever, we usually had a safe house kind of thing. Um and it's quite amazing within a day or two, like I think the first time, it wasn't that farm, but there was a little rescue done before that um which was kind of anonymous that I was involved in. We hung out with the chickens for a few days afterwards in this in this wherever they were and it was quite amazing how individual they were. Like and they start playing.

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Like we had um corn on the cob on a piece of string and we put it in. I always remember this, it was the first time they'd ever been out of a battery cage and the first night they were in the shed and they didn't really move and they were kind of terrified and everything. But on the second day with the corn on the cob on a string and they jumped up to peck it, and they were really cute and um that was really cool to just hang out with those few chickens. And we stayed at their house for a couple of days. And there was only like four or five chickens there. Um and that was the first time I really hung out with chickens you know. Even though I'd been doing animal rights for ages and read all the books and all the rest of it but a few days of hanging out with chickens and seeing their their change in personality. Cause like when you're in a factory farm and there's a hundred thousand of them, they don't have personality, they there's this mass thing and there's and then you're getting a chicken out of the cage and stuff

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But you take them home and you spend a few days with them and you're all individuals, that's the thing it's quite amazing. And that happened, that was the first rescue I did, that was before the one I got arrested but that was the first time I'd hung out with chickens, yeah.

*Int. How did it feel, like you said you were able to get four or five chickens but there was still a hundred thousand. How did it feel not being able to take all of them?*

John Yeah well at, and this is different, cause I've heard other people say different, but for me at the time, getting them out, like you kind of focus on that. So if you're in the farm you're worried about being caught and everything and you're getting the chickens and if you're filming as well you've got that to do. So the actual getting them out is fine um and I always felt like and then afterwards you kind of think, there's hundreds of thousands more and there's two and a half million or whatever

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And but I always felt like getting them out made you feel better, it was worth doing and you kind of concentrate on that. Like um and I, I find that going in and videoing and doing the investigations, which often get on TV, sometimes feels a bit futile because you're not taking chickens. Um even though my brain says that this film will get on TV and probably hundreds of thousands people will see it and stop buying eggs and that will save some chickens. But it's not the same as getting a chicken into a box and taking it home. Um and I think, I kind of always feel like it's way more satisfying to do. Like I don't like going into the farm and filming and then going away again, leaving those chickens behind

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But if you're taking a few, even if it's a few, even one, it feels like you've made a difference. Um yeah, in your heart. Logically you know that even

that filming will make a difference but it's way more different to to actually rescue some chickens. Yeah and a lot of people I've worked with have filmed the chickens and that but it's always different when you actually rescue a chicken.

*Int. Do you feel like you've saved a life?*

John Yep yep yeah. That's it, that's saving a life. It's like the filming is kind of abstract but saving a life is way different. Yeah

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*Int. It's interesting, can you elaborate on this more. You said, seeing a hundred thousand chickens is like seeing a mass of them and then you got a chance to spend some time with a few chickens and you saw them as individuals, elaborate on that a little, on that distinction.*

John Yeah I suppose it's that the factory farm itself is overwhelming, like it's so big and like I went in one recently that was even bigger. And I've been in ah I don't know if I've been in [farm] which is the biggest one in the country, I haven't been in that but I've been in other huge ones. Like there's different sorts. Um but I went in one which was like, I think it was about two stories high and there was ladders to climb up and stuff and but all of them overwhelming, especially those really big ones. And it's kind of difficult to focus on, um there's kind of, there's overwhelming suffering um but it's it's it's different from when you, like often you're in those farms and it's all over the place

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And it's two stories high and there's chickens everywhere and you're there filming it all, you're there to do a job which is usually filming or whatever. Um and then you go down to one cage and you film, you're looking through the camera at three chickens in one cage. Um and it's hard to get,

like even the in the same room, I'm trying to think, it's hard to get both those ideas in your head at the same time. Like on one hand, it's huge but on the other hand when you're down focusing on one chicken, it's just one chicken and their kind of suffering. And but you forget about the hundred thousand you know. So there's kind of, there's two different things going on. But when you rescue them, that's the thing that gets me and I always say like when you're inside the farm filming or even rescuing, it doesn't hit you emotionally there cause you're too busy, it's when you get home. And you're either reviewing your film footage and often we've been in the car driving back

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from the farm and we're just looking at the film in the back of the car. It's three in the morning whatever, and we're in the back seat of the car, someone's driving, and we looking at the footage, that's when it hits you. Because you're seeing these things, at the time you were, your focus, and it sounds weird, but at the time you're focusing on you know, is this in focus, is this the right frame. But when you're looking back on it you think, oh my god that chicken is dying and you know and suffering and all that. And that that happens when you're out of the shed, to me anyway yeah. Um and with rescuing them it often happens yeah when you get them home and you're in the house somewhere at three in the morning, and cause you got them in the car in boxes and then you get them out and it's usually, usually in the bathroom

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cause they shit everywhere um but usually it's in the house and you've got a little bathroom or shed and you take the chickens out for the first time um and that's when you kind of see them really. Cause you kind of get to hang out with them and you're individuals and like I say within a day or two, you can you know, cause they all look de-feathered and they all look

the same but within a day or two you can tell cause they have different personalities.

*Int. So you can tell them apart even?*

John Yeah yeah you can tell you know, that's the the cheeky one and that's the kind of shy one and all that. And that comes out once you've got them home or not in your home but wherever you get them. And often that night or the next day you're hanging out with them and then you see them as individuals

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But you often, I mean you know you're individuals intellectually but you don't see that when you're in the farm, it's only once you've got them out and then you kind of think and then a month later you know, you go and visit them and stuff and you see the same chickens that you rescued and that's a good feeling cause you got them out. And you think all those other hundred thousand didn't come out, they'd all be dead by now you know. So it's kind of um, for me it's difficult to get my head around the mass scale of it versus individuals and you only really get to know the individuals once you've got them out of the farm you know. Does that make sense?

*Int. Yeah, it does. Can you describe, you said it only ever hits you when you're out of the farm and like you're reviewing the footage that you just filmed, describe the emotions that hit you.*

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John Yeah, that's when you kind of because you're focusing on it. When you're in the farm you're focusing on the filming and not getting arrested and all the rest of it but when you're looking at the footage, you're thinking um cause you're thinking, ok this footage is gonna go on TV or something like

that and when you see that footage, you're thinking you know, is this footage any good? Have I achieved what I was setting out to do? And you see it and you realise, I have. This is awful, you know. This shows the scale of the farm and then we go down to one chicken and you think, there's a dead or dying chicken and then you think, yeah I have achieved you know, this footage is good

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And it cause it's showing the cruelty but and that's when you start thinking about the cruelty. I mean you obviously think about it kind of you know on abstract level when you're going in and when you're planning it but it doesn't hit you emotionally until you've got that film footage and you're focusing on it as as film. You know when you're doing it, you're thinking about all the technical stuff. But when you're, you've finished your mission, you're driving home and you're watching the footage or even just editing or preparing it, then you're looking at it as you know, what sort of did I get? Did I capture the essence of what's going on in that farm? And you have and then you think, that's when it hits you, cause you think, you've got this, it shows awful cruelty.

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Um and um and when you've done the rescue as well you've got this awful cruelty and then on the seat next to you there's a box with some chickens in it and you think, well it was worthwhile cause I got chickens out. But it's definitely, like I said, it's definitely a different emotion like the, none of it hits you when you're in the farm, for me anyway. Like I know, cause I'm, I've done a lot and often when I'm in the farm, I'm just doing the routine, I know what I'm doing, I know what I want. Um but often we've had taken people in the farms and especially if, they haven't it's their first time or whatever, um, they'll be really shocked. And everyone reacts differently you know, cause it's quite overwhelming. Um but I'm a bit, you

know, I've been doing it for a while and I sometimes I'm on automatic pilot when I'm in the farm. But it's like when you get out and you see the footage or you got those chickens out, that's when it hits you and

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especially the live chickens the next day that you've rescued, and even months later when you see them. And you're all happy and healthy and you're living in a home and you know and you when you see them you know and someone will say, oh where'd that chicken come from? And sometimes you can't say cause they don't know where they came from and they don't know you rescued the chicken but you see the chicken and you go, oh that's so and so, I remember that chicken from when I got it out of that cage you know.

*Int. So it's more rewarding when you see, by saving this life, it's almost like, a reward but shows you months later the result, like a direct result of what you've done.*

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John Yes even months later it's way more rewarding. Um that's why the rescue is way more rewarding than just the filming because you see the chicken the next day and even months later and you don't get that with film, even if like I've done some films that have been shown internationally and all over the place, and made a real impact. And I see them and think, oh that's cool, I did that. But it's nothing like meeting again the chickens that you rescued, it's completely different yeah.

*Int. How about, just from those experiences from where you were mentally at that point, how'd you feel about the farmers, what were your views of them?*

00:47:03

John

Um, at the point of rescue and stuff, um on one hand, you think that the people who do this are scum but on the other hand, you never see them so it's kind of abstract. The abstract scum, you know you're not real people, if they are real people then you start trying to run away cause you've been caught you know. And sometimes if you're on a farm at night and you run into people it's again, you don't think, oh there's that bastard factory farmer, I hate him. You think, oh shit, I've gotta leave, you know. Um so you don't think of, you don't think of them as, like on one hand, you hate why they do it but at the time if you ever run into one in the middle of the night, yeah you don't think of, you don't think, oh goody I'll go punch him in the head cause I hate him.

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You don't think that. You think trying to leave. Um so, for me anyway, I don't think of them as, I think you're scum on one level but it's kind of abstract and for me it's always been the system. Um but then on the other hand when I have met them I kinda do hate them for what they do. And like when I went to court, like the farmer came and testified and stuff and yeah it was kind of weird, I was kind of, he was he was quite elderly and kind of confused, and he was the father of the farm owner. When we went to that farm we thought, we targeted this particular farm cause the farm owner was on the industry board, the poultry board

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And we thought you know because, you know often if we expose something the industry will say, oh that's an extreme example, it's not typical. And we thought, we'll do this guy cause he's on the board and they can't say that. Um, but in the end when it went to court, his father who's also a part, he was the part owner of the farm, he was in charge of that particular shed so he gave evidence. Um and he was kind of, like in court, it was actually kind of fun in court because I was, he'd never been to

court before um and I had. And I was defending myself, so I was um, I had the advantage you know when testifying. And also he was, he'd never done public speaking. I mean he was speaking publicly in those cameras and stuff

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about factory farming. He was looking at the same footage as that I'd taken and saying it was perfectly ok, which was obviously ludicrous. And everyone in the jury, everyone, the public could see. So it was kind of like um too easy. I remember in that case it was kind of too easy cause he was obviously an idiot. Um like I didn't so much hate him, just thinking, oh my god this guy's just a loser. He's saying these things which are obviously completely out of touch with the real world you know, he was showing the footage that I had shot, and people, everyone who saw it was disgusted. But he was saying, oh there's nothing wrong with it but he didn't realise how stupid he sounded. Yeah so

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*Int. Do you think he was representative of the larger community of farmers and people who propagate the practice?*

John Um, I think he is, of most of the farmers, yes but I think the industry is more on to it. They know they have to be more careful. Like I think they were quite annoyed that he was on TV because I think they knew how bad it was going to be. But I think most farmers do think like that because they do it every day, you're used to it. So to them it is completely normal you know. So they genuinely don't think you're being cruel, you know. And they don't realise that the rest of the world, I mean they've kind of picked up that they shouldn't let people film inside their shed ah but they still don't think it's wrong you know. So you're kind of, they don't um, some of them

have realised that um you're gonna look stupid if they say those things. Yeah but it doesn't mean they've changed their views.

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*Int.* So in this particular case you were convicted of burglary, is that correct?

John Yep yeah

*Int.* So how, you say that it was obvious to you that the jury and members of the public saw what was really going on you know with the footage that you filmed, but you got convicted anyway. So how did that feel? Cause you obviously felt that you were doing the right thing but then you've got this conviction.

John Yeah um I kind of, I kind of knew going into it that yes I was doing the right thing but yes I was probably gonna get convicted anyway, because the law is not the same as common sense. So I knew that um I kind of, I mean my court strategy I kind of, I thought I had a chance of convincing the jury or the judge or whatever. Um and there's different parts of the law that you can kind of use and I used those. But I always knew it was an uphill battle. Like it doesn't matter what people think on factory farming, the law says you can't go around taking hens out of other people's farms

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So I knew I was probably gonna lose. Um so I wasn't surprised when I got convicted. Um but um I kind of, I knew that the law was against me yeah.

*Int.* So is that how you viewed the law at that stage, that the law was against you, during the court process?

John Um, yeah. I think even before that I knew that the law was against me. Yep and I still think that the law is against me.

*Int. So it hasn't changed or developed since then?*

John The law or my views?

*Int. Your view of the law*

John No I've always seen the law as against us. Like the law is a tool of the establishment and industry. So even though I know it's wrong um and what I'm doing is right, I've never had any illusions that that the law is gonna, I mean sometimes we can, activists anyway can

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win things but generally the law is always against us. It's always a struggle. Yeah so the law is always against us. We can sometimes beat it but it's not a level playing field. And I've always, yeah ever since I've been involved I've always seen that. I've seen too much of, too much evidence to have any illusions in the law.

*Int. What about agents of the law? Let's talk about the police for example. How do you view the police and how do you think the police view you?*

00:55:08

John Ah ok um I think my view of the police has probably changed. I used to think that most if not all cops were bad and were against us, the movement, the animals, whatever. Um probably since then I've, just through experience, I've realised that it's a bit different. That there are, cops are human, and lots of them support what we're doing. Um and quite often you'll get cops, even ones arresting you will say, good on you but the problem is, you're cops and you're paid to do their job and their job is to enforce the law. And the law is against us. So yeah police, individuals and stuff have always, when I was young, it was more black and white you know. But now

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I've kind of, with more experience, I've realised that cops can have a wider variety of views. But the trouble is generally they always enforce the law cause that's their job so they're not um they're not free to, they don't have any discretion. And there are still cops that are complete bastards and who hate you, whatever. But you sometimes, I always say there's good cops and bad cops, but they're all cops, that's probably how I see it.

*Int. How do you view the law, is it malleable, is it fluid or is it solid or what?*

00:57:25

John Um probably two things. One, since I've done these particularly this the battery hen court case and a couple of other court cases for protests, I've learnt quite a bit about the law. And on one hand, I find it quite fascinating the way the law works um and when I did the battery hen case, it was quite good to find all the possible defences I could use and the arguments and stuff. And that was quite interesting. Um so in some ways I have respect for the legal process cause it is quite interesting and has all these checks and balances and all the rest of it. But on the other hand, it's the law of the government.

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And it doesn't represent freedom or democracy or anything like that at all. It represents capitalism and industry, it's there to defend the state. And some things I might agree with the state about, like you shouldn't go around murdering people. But other things I disagree with. But the state, it's not, it doesn't have, it doesn't defend, well it certainly doesn't defend the interests of animals, never has. Like no matter what you look at, even the most mildest animal welfare law is flawed because it's based on the idea that animals are property. So from that point of view the law is always

an obstruction. Um so generally I think of the law as, sorry what was the question?

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*Int. How do you view the law?*

John Um yeah the law is it it's in the interests of the state and capitalism. It doesn't represent the interests of animals and it doesn't even represent the interests of most people yeah.

*Int. So would you say the law is behind, it's backward from where we should be?*

John Um well it's backward in a way but on the other hand, depends on, cause it represents the rich and powerful and industry, they're probably quite pleased with it. So it's not so much backward, it's just straight out wrong. But I think and I suppose when it comes to animals, like it, some people say it's backward because it would be really nice if animals weren't property and stuff, and the law should be more advanced. And I think well in theory it's right but in reality, the law represents interests of the powerful. So you know it's silly to expect it to do anything else

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The law won't change. The way we treat animals is something that society has to fix, not and the law will follow. If society has progressed to the point where most people don't eat meat and don't eat animals, then the law will catch up. But if, I don't really put much effort into lobbying politicians

*Int. Changing the law first*

John Yeah you change society and then politicians will eventually follow

1:01:00

*Int. So as an animal liberator and activist, if you had to describe how you saw yourself before versus how you see yourself now, has it changed or developed in any way?*

John Yeah um, I think I've gotten a lot more sensible since I was young. I think when I first got into it I was um very angry um, had no strategy, it was just full steam ahead regardless. Um and not a lot of thinking involved. It's kind of like right, animal abuse is happening um I'm gonna stop it, I'm gonna go to protests as often as possible, I'm gonna break the law um as often as possible but without much thought as to yeah if it's against animal abuse, I'll do it and there was not really much strategy

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Um and I think as I've gotten older and I think this happens to a lot of people as well, but for me as I've gotten older, I've kind of realised that a lot of things I did when I was young weren't particularly useful and a lot of them were probably counter-productive as far as, like I wasn't really thinking about what's the most effective? It was more like what is the most, what's gonna make me feel better now? Which and when I was young was often very confrontational protests and that felt like I was getting something done. If I pissed some people off that was a win and that's how I looked at it. And those people were animal abusers but I didn't think much more than that. It was kind of like, I'm against vivisection so I'll find some vivisectors and I will annoy them and harass them and bother them.

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I'm against factory farming so, I'm against hunting so I'll smash up a hunting shop. Now I think or even ten years ago, I think that the first few years I was like that and then I kinda thinking ok strategically, what's the best use of my time and how are we gonna change society? You know,

what's the most effective way to change society and stuff. And I think I was always into um taking on the big targets. Like I know some other people did things like, smash up butcher shops or they'd taken a fur shop or whatever. But I always thought, I want to get at the big companies, the big corporations and the industry. Um so my kind of thing, and and I think that's why I was I'm a bit regretful about the hunting shop thing, because I got convicted for that and became known for that

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But really it wasn't typical of, maybe it was at the time, but later on I kind of thought, nah I'd rather stick to factory farming and that kind of thing, you know. Like for example I haven't done any anti-hunting, I mean I'm opposed to hunting, but I haven't done any anti-hunting activism in years cause it's not a priority, you know. So I always stuck to factory farming and the meat industry and vivisection. And I sorry I lost the plot, what was the question?

*Int. Oh we're talking about how you see yourself now*

John Yeah so I think I got a lot more strategic um and now and having been involved in factory farming stuff for years, I did a lot of anti-vivisection campaigning and a lot of factory farming stuff for years and now I'm not sure what I'm doing. Like right now, I'm actually between campaigns so to speak and trying to figure out what I'm gonna do now

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*Int. So you're not sure what you're gonna do in the immediate future?*

John In the immediate future I'm not really sure but I know I won't ever go back to that random campaign stuff. I'm more kind of trying to decide what is the most strategic thing to do you know. And that might well be, unless someone convinces me otherwise, it's probably gonna be something like

investigations and stuff like that. You know cause that's something I've done a lot and is always useful. So even if I can't think of anything to do, I might as well carry on doing investigations cause it's gonna be useful for someone somewhere. Yeah so I suppose since I got involved I have changed my views on what is the best way to campaign and stuff like that, yeah. And I've probably become grumpier.

*Int. Why do you think you've become grumpier?*

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John Um kind of I've become the more, like I haven't become mellow in my old age, the more I find out, the more angry I am about animal abuse. Um and the strategy thing is still, so I suppose I'm still um, what you call militant or extreme or whatever. But I may not look it because I don't do the stuff I did when I was young and I haven't been arrested in ages but my views are still the same and probably more so. It's more like, I know that it's not productive to rush out and get arrested every week or whatever, like I used to do. Um, ok or every month at least but now I'm thinking, you know, what's the most effective use of my time? But it's not that I've mellowed, it's more that I'm thinking more about what I should do, what's you know, how to do it?

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*Int. But your motivations, your core motivations, would you say haven't changed?*

John Yes yeah. No core motivation has probably gotten, I've probably gotten more determined, yeah um yeah and at the same time probably slightly more depressed because the more I find out about strategy and what works and what doesn't, the more I realise what a big job it is. Because I think when I was young I thought, I was just gonna kick some ass and get arrested and chain myself and eventually we'll win. And now I kind of

realise, it's gonna take way more than that. You know, it's gonna take changing society. I think when I was young, I was thinking me and my mates can probably win this if only we get arrested enough and are loud enough and noisy enough. And then you kind of think, oh yeah no it's bigger, it's bigger. Like it's like to change say the meat industry, it's the you know, it's the way humans eat throughout most of the planet, it's a huge thing

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It's changing all society from top to bottom. And when you think of it like that, it's quite depressing. Um but when I was young I didn't think of it like that. I just thought I'll go out and do what I can. And now I'm kind of thinking, so the more strategically you think, the more depressed you get cause you realise how big it is. And even vivisection, that's kind of, that's the pharmaceutical industry, not all of it but it's still you know. And so it's like, it's not me and my mates anymore. It's like thinking about how can we change society. And that's a big thing and can be quite overwhelming. Like you know, I know lots of people drop out of the movement when they get to that stage of thinking, what can I do and they think, oh maybe I can't do anything, maybe it's too difficult, maybe I should just go and forget about it cause it's too depressing, too miserable and I can just go and get a job, have a nice life and not worry

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And that's quite a, that's always there you know. You're always kind of thinking, oh I can just forget about it like most people. Cause most people don't think about it and life might be easier.

*Int. But why don't you, like, how would you describe those emotions, why not?*

John Um because I know um and what I'm saying is that feeling still comes to me sometimes, I think you know, like I know all this stuff and I know that

I've got lots of experience in fighting it, and if I can't figure it out then you know, who can? Like it's kind of like, you have to, I suppose I've kind of, like on one hand I think, it's not up to me right now today, and I can and do take a break from it because I think a lot of people get burnt out cause they don't take a break and the enormity of it all

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They think you know, I can't do it anymore I'll quit, you know. So I don't think that but I can see that I do need to take a break from it and I do need to look after myself sometimes. And I am slower than I was you know. Like I don't live animal rights every single day anymore like I used to because that would burn me out. But I'm more kind of stepping back and thinking strategically and kind of saying, ok well what's something I can do that's going to be effective and then doing that. But if I can't think of anything effective to do, I'll just do something else for a week, come back. So and at the moment like I said, I'm trying to think of what I'm gonna do but I'm still, I suppose I'm now long-term committed which means that I don't have to rush round feeling guilty if I don't do anything today which is, cause I used to be, I'd feel terrible if I hadn't done

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anything and now I don't feel that because I know I'm in it for the next forty years fifty years, yeah. So it's quite a different way of doing activism from when I started um and I think it might be a better way but I'm not, I'll let you know. It's slower and steadier you know than when I started, yep.

*Int. And what about just in terms of people that are around you, people that you share your role with, your colleagues, companions, how do you view them. In terms of, are they important to you and if they are, why? If they weren't around would you still be doing this? What's their purpose for you, if you like?*

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John Um I think it is really important and one of the reasons I haven't dropped out is because I have a little scene around me of, like my partners' vegan and we've been together um, sixteen years and we were both vegan way before then. Um and I've got a bunch of people, like there's a quite a good vegan social scene, so like I can, lots of my, not all my friends, I've got you know friends who aren't vegans and they're meat eaters and stuff. But I've always got vegan community so that even when I take a break, I'm still hanging around people that think like me. Um and I think that's really important for um sustaining people. You know the reason I, like I say, if my partner wasn't vegan and I didn't know many other vegans, then

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I would be more tempted by that little thing in my head that says, oh wouldn't it be easier to just go away and give up you know. But that kind of being part of a community um even if they're not, even if they're not, none of us are super activists, even if they're not activists, just being part of that community means you're still, like you're not um banging your head against a brick wall all the time. If you're having people that understand and agree with you, I mean, it kind of sounds obvious but yeah, it is really important, yeah for keeping people motivated and involved, yeah.

01:14:02

*Int. What about people outside of that group, how do you think they view you?*

John Um, people I know or strangers?

*Int. Um, both. People that you know that aren't part of your group, your family for example.*

John Yeah there's people like that, family and friends who aren't involved in animal rights kind of ah, because I've been at it for so long, they kind of

accept me. And they um, it's not so much that they, they don't disagree with me, they're just not into it. Um and I think they see me as, I think particularly when I was young I was in this full on kind of scene and like I said, I didn't really hang out with anyone, friends or family that weren't into it

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Um and now I do, which I think makes me much more sensible and balanced. And those people see me as, you know, they know I'm vegan and most of them know that I've got a criminal record and stuff like that. But they don't and they, even if they're not into it, they still see that criminal record as not a criminal thing. You know like none of those people are shocked. Um yeah once they know me, if they say, if I say I've got a conviction for burglary, they don't think of it as, oh he's got a conviction for burglary. They think, he's done some animal rights stuff. Yeah um

*Int. What about people that don't know you?*

John People that don't know me, it's um, I usually don't mention it. Um obviously most people know, people I work with and stuff, know I'm vegan, or they find out at lunch time that I'm vegan um or I tell them because I wanna eat

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Um, and it is hard if people who don't know you, if you do, like the only occasion I have to explain it is, say if I'm applying for a job and I do find that really difficult when you're applying for a job and you have to declare any criminal convictions. You know it's kind of like, if you say, yes but here's why and you write an essay um, it's, if they don't know you, it's still not very convincing you know. It's kind of like, I applied for a job a while ago where I did kind of write a bit of an essay yeah, any convictions please explain and I wrote all this stuff. Um and I think I went a bit

overboard you know. I should've just said, yes but for a protest or something like that, yeah. And that's kind of, they never called me back

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You know and I still have problems with that. Like I don't know what to say, like if people know me, it's fine but if they don't know you and they say, have you got criminal convictions and if you need to declare them then it's quite difficult to explain that this is not, it's not for anything bad you know, it's for, because most people are opposed to battery farming and stuff like that. So if you can explain it in that way but I've got I think ten convictions so like last time I had to declare them you know, you can't explain ten convictions in one sentence.

*Int. And also what creeps up is criminal convictions as perceived by most people for example, if you just put down burglary, they might perceive it as a selfish act?*

01:18:03

John        Yep

*Int. So let's talk about that distinction. So you said the difficulty of declaring and explaining*

John        To people I don't know

*Int. Yep, to people you don't know. Are there any other reasons why that difficulty is there other than you might not have enough paper?*

John        Um, I think it's partly the paper stuff cause on paper

*Int. Ok, so it's practical*

John        Yeah it looks bad. If I got to the stage of an interview and someone asked me about it, I'm confident that I could explain

*Int. Ok, I see so it's the difference between face to face and on paper*

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John Yeah and especially because it's battery farming. The hunting shop one is a lot more tricky but battery farming, most people, strangers that you would meet in this country, ninety five percent of them, even if they're not, they say they're against it. Like it's a popular thing, it's an easy thing to say, yeah it's like being ah, if someone was arrested in the Springbok tour and the anti-apartheid stuff now it's kind of like a badge of honour and all this kind of stuff. And I think battery farming will be like that in twenty years too. So that one's easy um, unlike the hunting one but um, it's a matter of speaking to them. It's like on paper, my criminal record looks bad. You know, I've got for burglary, criminal damage and a whole lot of others for protests which, and protest ones, out of context sound really bad, like you know, disorderly behaviour and all this kind of stuff

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So it's more like on paper and in official stuff um it's hard to explain, you know, people assume, you know, when they see burglary that it sounds bad yeah but I'm confident that I can, if they get passed that to the point of meeting me, and they say, what have you got this conviction for? I can say well here's why. But it's much harder to write that down yeah.

*Int. Do you feel then that at face value, like on paper, you're grouped into the same group as someone who would burglarise a shop for personal gain?*

John On paper, yes

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I think that the law doesn't distinguish at all. So like on paper and all that kind of thing, without any humans involved, there's no distinction at all in law, that's what I mean. But if I meet someone and explain it, it's quite

different. They say, oh you're not really a criminal you know, that kind of thing. And also going through the court system, like on one hand you're treated um, on paper you're treated the same. Like you've been arrested and charged and now you're convicted and you have to do this that and the other thing. But all the way through, court is run by humans and so they do treat you differently because it's political. And sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad

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Like sometimes some people in the court system see a political thing as much worse than your common criminal because you're a threat to the establishment or whatever but on the other hand, some people see it, and particularly with animal rights, they see it as, oh you're no way near as bad as a criminal. You know, like criminals are bad but you just rescued chickens or whatever. And also of course I and most other animal rights activists tend to be more articulate and whatever in the system. You know we can explain ourselves better than the average crim. Um and we tend to have much more support. Like not just wide support but practical support. Like you know when I go to court, it's not you know, your average crim, when you go to court you see all these people turning up, you've got no idea what's happening to them, and they've got no support and they haven't spoken to a lawyer and they don't know what's going on. Whereas when I go to court or another activist goes to court

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we always have sympathetic lawyers, back up money, I mean not a lot of money but you know, it's a community thing. Yeah so and the court sees that too you know and when the judge sees that you're there with twenty people supporting you, it's not just some random person. So I think that on paper, there's no, if you looked at any of these cases, my cases or my criminal record or whatever on paper, that the law doesn't distinguish at all

but in the process there's always humans involved and they can be, all these little biases come in

*Int. And would that affect the punishment, or if there was a punishment, in your view then?*

John Yes, yep

*Int. In what way?*

01:23:55

John Um like for example, I think most of the things that I think apart from a couple of my convictions, most of them I'd receive far less punishment than I would've if it was for a common criminal thing and that's specifically because it was animal rights. Um like for example, with the rescuing hens, um the judge liked me. Um, I don't know if all of the jury liked me but the judge liked me and he, and cause I was defending myself as well, it's his job to make sure I knew the system and everything but he, so he found me guilty and he directed the jury to pretty much find me guilty, because of the way I'd done things. But when it came to sentencing, he was very lenient you know, compared to you know, and he said so. He said, look you know, this is not a common criminal thing, he saw me as not a criminal. He was like, I'm um you know I've done this for, I don't know if he used the word altruistic but he said, I've done this for non-selfish reasons um and

01:25:08

gave me a sentence of community service. Yeah so and there's one conviction I had where the judge treated me, I'm not sure whether he treated me worse or whether he, he was a judge famous for giving people ridiculous sentences. Um so but yeah most of the time I've gotten definitely more lenient than if I was just a crim kind of thing. Like I mean

my first conviction for the hunting shop, the I remember, I remember going to court, cause we pleaded guilty for that cause we were caught red handed. I mean literally red handed cause we had paint all over us and stuff. Um when we got convicted we pled guilty for that and got convicted, and I remember everyone else that day was getting way harsher sentences for the most minor things

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You know, like a mum stealing a sandwich from a café to feed her kid got more than we did. And we deliberately smashed up a shop causing thousands of dollars of damage you know, it was ridiculous. But and that was because we were seen as political and we were seen as um and we had a good lawyer, he volunteered to do us for free and I think the judge recognised him and thought, ok these guys are in a different class of people from the rest of day so yeah

*Int. Often with criminal proceedings, the issue of remorse comes into it from a legal perspective, so how did that affect you in your experience?*

01:27:15

John I think it's never overtly come up because it's obvious that everything I did was political. So the judge and probation officers, they never even asked. They'd look at their, presumably they'd have a form where it says, is there remorse and they say, oh I'm not even gonna ask you that John you know. Cause it's always been seen as and it might be different for people with, I'm just trying to think if I've had, I've been convicted for some protest stuff where it's been a bit doubtful you know, whether I did it or not kind of thing. Um but I think even those ones, it hasn't been, yeah I've never been asked really. Cause it's always been seen as political, yeah

*Int. And your motivations would have been clear do you think?*

01:28:04

John Yeah and they kind of, they don't like it but they, cause they know I think political people are in a different category so they don't even, you know, if you're a crim, you know, I've done something bad and I'm expected to be apologetic. Um but if you're political, they know you're not gonna be apologetic. But at the same time, they don't expect you to be. Like it's kind of, so you don't get punished for not being apologetic really because it's political. Does that make sense?

*Int. Yeah it does. At this stage, would you be ready to give your message to the world? So what would your message be as an animal liberator and activist?*

01:29:27

John Um, I suppose one thing, I'll just babble. One thing is um, I've never seen it, what I do as offending. Like I never, like it's weird, I walk into a court room dozens of times and never ever felt um you know, regret or shame or any of that kind of stuff. And you can see it, the whole court is designed to do that, and you see it in other people. They just think, oh my god I'm so embarrassed and ashamed to be here and I've fucked up my life or someone else's life or whatever. And not all the people do but you see that quite a lot. But I've never felt that and I've always you know, everything I've done, has, it's never been um, it's like I said at the very start,

01:30:24

that with turning vegetarian was always just logical. I've never had any doubts, I mean I've had doubts about you know, should have I done it that way or shouldn't have been caught or anything but I've never ever had any doubt that what I was doing was perfectly right and nothing to be ashamed of and it was the right thing to do. Yeah so yeah breaking the

law to save animals has always been the right thing to do for me. It's never been, I've never had any doubt that it was a bad you know, I've never thought, maybe I'm bad, maybe I'm bad or anything. It doesn't come into it, it never has, yeah. It's never been a, it's always been, like yeah I never ever felt like a criminal. I've always felt like breaking the law is just the, is a, I don't wanna say it was natural but it's always, yeah for me breaking the law is just a tactical thing, it's never a moral thing

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Like it's just, I fight for animal rights and sometimes that involves breaking the law. Sometimes it doesn't. But there's no moral qualms or anything, you know. And I still think that even if I don't do it as often now, I still think it's, and when I hear about other people breaking the law you know, I still totally support that and understand why people would do that because it's just, it's the right thing to do. Yeah, I've never felt like a criminal.

01:32:22

*Int. Great, I really like your message. The other I was gonna ask you, I keep referring to you as an animal liberator and activist, but do you call yourself something else. Like, I don't mean the name of your group but your role, do you term it as something else?*

John Um, I suppose I call myself an animal rights activist. Yeah, which sometimes involves liberating animals and sometimes doesn't. Most of the time it doesn't, it's not really as exciting as that but um, an animal liberator, I, sometimes I call myself an animal liberation activist cause that kind of implies a bit more. Yeah so I suppose I'm an animal rights activist, yeah. I mean I'm other things as well some days.

01:33:30

*Int.* So as we were going through the interview, do you want to cover anything else, do you feel we've missed anything or would you like to give some more detail to something?

John I suppose, when I think about it, some of the stuff I've done is high risk but I don't think about it in those terms very often

*Int.* What terms do you

John Um, like I suppose it's gradual. Like I said, when I first got involved it seemed natural to be vegetarian and then um, did I tell you about going vegan, that was another couple of years later?

*Int.* Ok, let's talk about that transition

John Ok um but all of those steps and then when I first heard about people breaking the law for animals, it just seemed perfectly sensible. It's like well, if the law is wrong you should break it. You know there's the law, if there's animals in a cage being treated cruelly and it's illegal to get them out, it doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, it just means you should take a bit more care not to get caught

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or whatever. And it always seemed natural so when I say this thing is about high risk I think, I suppose it is and I, sometimes, I suppose I'm used to it now, but I often find it interesting that people see it as high risk or the people who, like friends of mine, especially non, like animal rights activists who know me, often kind of think, oh you do all that stuff and I'm like, well you can do it too, it's not that hard. And then people who aren't animal rights activists always go, oh there's John he does all that high risk stuff. Um but I don't think of it as high risk. I mean I know it's risky but I don't, like I don't see myself as being particularly, I mean I've done it for twenty years

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but I don't, but then other people do other things for twenty years. I'm not a super hero or anything like that and I find it odd when people, especially animal rights people sometimes say, oh you're awesome cause you do all this stuff and I, but I don't see it as high risk. It's just like, I mean it is, I see it as high risk five minutes before I'm going into the farm but I don't, if you said to me, are you a high risk animal rights activist? I'd say, not really you know

01:36:14

I've done some things that are high risk but that's just cause you have to do them, yeah. Does that make sense?

*Int. It makes perfect sense*

John Yeah so I don't. Cause I think when I got arrested for the hunting shop and even the open rescue, like all of those things, we took precautions and were very careful because we knew that there was a risk but it didn't, like we never looked at each other and said, oh my god

01:37:30

maybe we should stop, this is ridiculous, we didn't have that. We just, well we gotta do this, it's a bit risky, how do we make sure we succeed? But it was never kind of, it was never like, oh shit, maybe we should stop you know. Mmm yeah

*Int. Um, from this point, is there anything else that you want to cover?*

John Um, I don't think so

*Int. Ok, well thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate it.*

John You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW