

TRANSCRIPT - Diana Bailey on 'Mother was a Blackshirt' BBC Radio 4 - 04/01/10

Interviewer (INT) - I was surprised when I heard about Diana Bailey who painted fascist slogans on the streets of Bognor Regis as a girl. She clearly remembers her mother and father in their Blackshirt uniforms.

Diana Bailey (DB) - They were robed and attired in these rather horrific garments and it used to embarrass us children very considerably because my mother would be selling the papers on the corner of the street and things like that, and our friends were very disgusted with this.

INT - So you would see your mother and father dressed in Blackshirt uniforms selling newspapers on the streets?

DB - Yes, it was humiliating. We were also taken out in the evening and paint the streets with 'Britain Awake' and 'PJ' - Perish the Jews, and all sorts of things like that. So we were part of the team that painted the slogans on the walls.

INT - So how old would you have been when you started painting fascist slogans on the wall?

DB - About nine and ten, my brother would have been seven and eight. That's when we started. You know how children rather enjoy something that's a little bit extreme, so we rather enjoyed it. Subsequently of course you know the consequences, but you know at the time I felt rather proud about doing it.

INT - But your parents would take you along to the Blackshirt meetings?

DB - They did, they did. Yes.

INT - Can you describe those meetings for me?

DB - Well, they were usually in the same place. There was a fisherman called Mr Howe, and I remember various people who used to come to the meetings, they were always the same people. I can't tell you what they were talking about because I can't really remember, because it was mostly to do with the leader and the fascists, and the BU they used to call it; so that we were very bored with the context of the meetings as children, but we were sitting in the back.

INT - And by the leader you mean Oswald Mosley?

DB - Absolutely.

INT - Diana Bailey gave me a taste of what life could have been like if my mother had been recruited that day.

DB - When I was 13 I was at boarding school and I was reading the newspaper in the Common Room and the headline said 'Naval Officer's Wife Interned', and I was reading on and I saw it was my mother was interned in 18B, and that's really when suddenly everything came home.

INT - So there you were, a school girl at the age of 13 and you read in the newspaper that your mother had been taken to Holloway Prison?

DB - That's right, yes. It was utterly shaming and rather horrific. I think I nearly fainted; I was rather given to fainting in those days. But having read that I was completely appalled and I remember taking her some fruit and ringing at this big doorbell and giving her number, which I remember F4114796, and going in and seeing my mother who was only 38 or 39 years old at the time. Her hair had gone white, she looked completely distraught, she was crying all the time. We were sitting opposite her and I felt in a terrible way almost repulsion because she was so different from what I had seen before. She wasn't my mother at all.

INT - Diana Bailey continues to live with the consequences of her parents actions. She says she will never lose her sense of guilt.

DB - Subsequently when Richard Dimbleby went into Belsen I suddenly felt the whole guilt of the world on my shoulders; and it was a huge sort of volte-face and I turned around and for the rest of my life tried to overcome what they were promoting. I did feel utterly responsible for what had happened in the camps in Europe because of what I had done as a child; and I had said 'Perish the Jews' and I had painted 'PJ' on the streets. So it was something that dug deep into me and I never to this day have got over that.