Mary Hughes - Extracts

Coming to London from Ireland as a young girl. Leaving her fiancée before their wedding. Getting into the Gateways. The welcome at the Gateways from Gina and Smithy.

**Extract 1**

I was born in Southern Ireland, in Wexford, Wexford Town, And we came to London in 1952 when it wasn’t particularly, um, cool to be Irish, in fact it was very, very difficult for new immigrants at the time and I remember in Camden Town I was able to read and I asked mum, “mum why don’t they like us?” because in so many, um, newsagents windows it said ‘Sorry, no Irish, no coloured, no dogs’ and if they thought they were being polite they would say, um, ‘No Irish, no people of colour or no animals’ and that was outlawed in, um, 1961, fortunately.

And, er, we lived in Chalk Farm and it wasn’t … the part of Chalk Farm where we lived there were no Irish people so we were a bit ostracised and some of the children weren’t, um, supposed to play with me and I went to a primary school and did quite well and I, um, passed my 11 plus and then I had a double-whammy with the neighbours because, um, they thought she’s Irish and why should she, um, go to a grammar school.

**Extract 2**

we were going to … we were all set to get married. I’d recovered. I was back at work and this was moving on to 1966 and we’d set the wedding date. I was foolishly set the date to coincide with the World Cup . We were going to get married on the following Saturday and there we had a house and because, in the police in those days they had a very generous rent allowance and we had …. We were getting the house ready and we n Oakwood, which is a branch of Enfield, and, um, in May of 1966 I was flat-sharing with a school-friend in Muswell Hill and there was xxx I just can’t go through with it. I said I’m going to pack a couple of cases. I said I’m not marrying Michael … I just can’t go through with it so she said, everybody I believe I’ve heard my mother and my aunt my friends everybody gets cold feet getting married, I think, final commitment. You’re virtually giving yourself to another person, especially way back in the sixties. But I knew there was something deeper than that. I, um, I just … I just couldn’t face him. I couldn’t tell anybody, So what happened I … a couple of weeks later I did pack a couple of suitcases and, er, got a taxi from Muswell Hill down to Euston Station and I didn’t know where I was going. I just looked up and I saw Blackpool and, um, she thought I was completely made and, um, anyway I ran away and I felt quite a coward for running away and, um, I stayed two months in Blackpool … I wrote him a letter and I told him that I couldn’t go through with it and, um, I left everybody in the lurch. My parents were less than pleased because they’d arranged for people to come from near and far and the venue was booked and I was going to get married and it was going to be a church wedding and all of this business and I just, just couldn’t face it because I had feelings that I was gay thought I’m going to be living a lie. I’m going to be … I’m not going to be happy. I’m going to make him unhappy and, um, I thought it was the only … the best thing I could do but for many years I was loaded with guilt two people a couple of friends and they said how brave I was to do that … because while my mother kept putting me down, saying I was just, you know, I was … such a cowardly thing to do but since then a lot of people have said how brave I was because going so far they would have had to go through with it.

**Extract 3**

I was, I was looking for a way into the Gateways I'd heard about the Gateways because I read an article in 1965 in the New Statesman. It was D M or G. Um, Leslie, it was either Dianna Chapman or Esme Langley had, um, given an interview to, uh, to the labor. It's still going the New Statesman. I think, and they'd given an interview, a lengthy double page interview to the M or G. And I didn't know a way in, uh, and, um, somebody, uh, in the office said that they'd heard of someplace called The Gateways in Chelsea, but it was very, very difficult to get into. And they also said that you had to be sponsored or recommended. And M or G mentioned the gateways too. And they, they sort of reinforce, you know, reinforce that it was very difficult to get in. And the membership was quite selected. You had to be seconded by somebody. And, um, and then. That's right after that Martin mentioned The subway. Uh, just at the other side of, on the same sort of street it. No that was definitely in Carlisle Street, just off Wardour Street and the downstairs parts. and there were some people from the Gateways there and introduced me to an Irish girl by the name of Pat. And, uh, she, and he said Mary would love to go down to the Gateways and then arranged to meet her, uh, on, um, I think it was Sunday evening and she signed me in to the Gateways and that was, uh, November 19. I, always remeber that because I felt as I was coming home, that was November, 1966.

**Extract 4**

The welcome in the Gates. Gina and Smithy, Gina. Wasn't a bit, it wasn't a very friendly person. She was used to sit at the end of a day at the desk at the end of the flight of stairs. It was, um, we went in as through a gate off Bramerton street, just around the corner from the King's Road. In through a gate, you rang the bell, usually a very butch, uh, heavy butch character run up and run up the stairs and let you in. And then Gina was always perched on the stool. And even when I've been a regular at the gates for many months say hello Gina and she looks straight through you. She used to sit there with a a cigarette holder. Uh, not very welcoming, not at all and Smithy her em partner or the person who managed the, the bar, um, side of things was slightly more friendly Smithy was an American and apparently she'd come down to the Gates and she decided she liked it. She, when she left the, um, I think she was based at South Ruislip she was a Sergeant in the American air force. I believe. And she liked England so much that she's actually stayed. And, um, whether they were relationship or not, nobody knows, but they were obviously, um, very close and neither of them were very, very welcoming, but it didn't matter because there was nowhere else to go.