

I was born in Ireland and my father joined the RAF during the 2nd world war and stayed there so when I was 4 years of age, we were moved to England but we have lived in Wales, me and my wife Joan, for the last 27 years.

I was working in Trade union education in Oxford and travelled a lot for my work. I had many friends in the Rhondda that we visited and I suppose the first thing we noticed was how many houses were for sale here in the valleys.

Where we lived in Oxford, my good friend Mrs Thatcher had passed a law that increased our rent of 120%, which meant we couldn't afford to stay there.

And here we could afford to buy a house for half our rent in Oxford.

The whole valleys were for sale at that time because everybody had left so that's what we did. Since we are here, everything became greener as the coal industry disappeared but also the population left too, there's no work so young people just go away and it will continue. The valleys are dying now and there were a part of Britain where people had vision, vision, you won't see that now but all around the valleys, miners built miners institutes and hospitals, and the miners strike broke that hope, broke that belief and that pride.

I'm Irish and one of the keys to Irish identity is being able to speak English and Irish Gaelic. If you want to engender Welsh Nationalism and a pride in Wales then both the languages need to be used as the norm. But now I think people are fighting irrelevant battles. Get the key battles fought first – get people in work. Welsh pride comes from having pride in yourself. I think devolution has worked pretty well though, I think it helped us. But devolution did not come about because of burning houses and so on, it came about because huge areas of the country felt divorced from Westminster. They had to give Wales something because they were giving Scotland far more. We were short changed in Wales compared to Scotland. I wonder what will happen if Scotland becomes independent which they might do. What will Britain become then? Will Wales also start thinking about independence? I don't know. It's all happening a bit too fast and I suppose when you get older you don't like changes.

I'm actually a supporter of the European Union, I'm not a supporter of the way it's going now, because I think they've gone too far too fast and they've ignored their own rules, they're allowing countries in that aren't meeting the financial constraints they should be meeting and that's causing huge problems, but I am a supporter of the EU – Do I feel a part of it? Well, yeah of course.

When I was younger, I used to hear older people now and again saying "I think I've lived too long, I'm ready to go" and I never understood it but I do now. I still enjoy life but I understand. And I am transferring this thought to the valleys, I don't see any future here, I think the valleys will gradually empty themselves, and maybe that's a good thing. Younger people have to go, there's no work, they have to go and when they stay they get into drugs or alcohol so yes it will become more and more empty so yes it's time to go.

I worked in the merchant Navy, where I was part of a union then left it and went to work in a factory, joined a different union there and slowly became an active trade unionist.

I ran away to sea when I was 18, things weren't too good at home so I decided to go. At the time I was living at an auntie's of mine because my mother died when I was 4½, so she was never in the frame in that sense, and my father was in the RAF which did him no good at all, and he left an alcoholic, so at a point the police had to step in, took me to an auntie's, then the auntie had to go to Canada for about 7 months because her daughter who had emigrated there was ill, and things weren't too good with me and one of my cousins so I just took myself off to Liverpool and went to sea. The Merchant Navy we're talking about. I didn't want to go in the Royal Navy, I'm not very good at taking orders.

So I did 3 years in the Merchant Navy, and then we had a strike. The ship I was on was at sea at the time, and you can't go on strike when you are at sea, because it's mutiny, which

back then, 1966, still carried the death penalty. So we had a vote at sea, and, unusual for me, I voted against the strike. The majority voted for it, but we had to get back to our homeport, we couldn't reach London and strike, that was the law. So when we eventually got back to Liverpool we went on strike. I was on strike then for 9 weeks, and then the Union recommended a settlement to go back to work. I thought "This is rubbish, this is exactly what we could have got 10 weeks ago, so now I want to stay out on strike." But everybody voted to go back! And so that's when I said "That's it, I'm staying ashore" and I didn't go back, so that's it!

To be honest I loved being at sea, I was quite happy... I had enough money to get drunk every fourth port I went to, the women were very friendly when I was ashore, I didn't see any point to go on strike! But then having got me out on strike you think "I'm losing what is effectively my money", that was a 9-10 weeks pay. The Union then asked me to go back on terms we could have got 10 weeks before. I couldn't see the point. I mean if you're going to go on strike to improve then stay on strike until you get the improvement!

I don't know why I got so involved in the union after that, people say it's because I am Irish, I am against everything, instinctively. I think I just don't like injustice and I fight it when I can and how I

can which is why I got involved in trade union in South Africa.

When I was in the merchant navy, we went into Cape town, the boilers needed cleaning but they were really hot, boiling, so us, the crew said we needed to wait 4 days until it's cool enough to be able to clean them and of course that meant losing money for the management. So they brought black workers, paid miserably, bits of sack to protect their hands and feet and sent them to clean the boilers. They were burnt and blistered and I thought "What is going on? What's all this about?" and sometimes you should do something and you don't and you then have to live your life with it on your conscience and we didn't do anything about it and we should have, we were just glad it wasn't us. So after that I decided that the only thing was to change the system and I did. It didn't happen all of a sudden, it took a while to sink in, I found all sorts of excuses for myself, that I wouldn't have been able to do something on my own anyway but that's not true and it kept on coming back because even if you are alone, if you know it's wrong you need to do something about it.

Being an active shop steward in the 70's meant something, if you did the job properly it was something to be proud of, you were helping people. At the same time, when I was fighting causes, I would make myself unpopular particularly with the management so yes it had a negative effect economically, you'd be passed over for promotion etc., so financially not great, but the up side is I knew what I was doing was right so I could live with myself and whenever I think of those poor black workers in Cape town, I still can't live with myself for turning my back on them.

When I was working with the black trade union in South Africa, I was always frightened that if I was arrested and interrogated, the way they used to interrogate in South Africa at that time, I would give names away. I was arrested and I was interrogated and I stood up to it and I've learnt about myself, I learnt that actually I was a better person than I was giving myself credit for. So I don't care now, I don't care what happens, people can do what they want, I have faced far stronger people than them. I haven't changed the world but I've done something to help.

Several people I met changed my life, there were people in the trade union whom I admired very much who weren't necessarily major figures, just ordinary people with strong belief. The most famous one that influenced me, Jack Jones, the conservative government hated him – that was one of the reasons why I liked him.

He went to fight in the international brigade against Franco, tremendous man, a lovely man, it sounds contradictory because he fought in the Spanish war but he was a very

gentle man, a very kind man always willing to help others. And he taught me patience, which I was running short of and still do from time to time.

People no longer believe in anything, we lost faith in the institutions, politicians, nobody believes a word they say, the majority of people have a total contempt for politicians but you got to have something you believe in otherwise how do you change things? When you stop believing in anything, you then just roll over and let anything happen. But people are interested if you talk about one issue as opposed to the whole thing, this South Wales programme, this reconfiguration of the hospitals, the people in authority were astounded by the reaction they got. They couldn't believe it. If you talk to these companies who do surveys and questionnaires, they expect only to get a handful of responses from many questions. But 76,000 people responded because it was a specific issue and you could focus on it and you could get away from political parties.

People say young people aren't interested in politic, I don't think that's correct, I think they're not interested in political parties, now give them an issue, and they are interested.

Growing older to me is a huge disappointment, all this romantic nonsense about doting grandparents is rubbish, once you are age 60, your health starts going and money worries pile up. Whatever you want to do, do it before you are 60 because afterwards it's not gonna work.

One good thing about getting old – you do come to term with death, you have to because all your friends and family are dropping away, so I don't give a monkey if I take a political stand now and people come to arrest me, come and do it, I don't have plans of becoming a footballer or a famous actor, I've got nothing to lose.

My advice is to be true to yourself, you know deep inside your heart if you are doing something wrong, if it feels wrong and the whole world is doing it, don't do it, it's very easy to say but very hard to live by. Because you've got to live with yourself and you don't want to get to my age, look back and remember 1963 when I turned my back on those black lads going in with sacking wrapped around their feet into these burning boilers. And I am still talking about it now 2014. If I had been true to myself I wouldn't be there still.