

INTERVIEWEE: Jo Whelan
DATE OF BIRTH : 1963
PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS
Father: London Buses
Mother: Retail
INTERVIEW LOCATION Griffin Pub, Brentford
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 7th July 2020
INTERVIEWER: Eshan Puri
SUMMARISER: Natasha Joslin

Jo first started going to Brentford around 11 years old in 1974, she wasn't really interested in shopping and it was something to do on a Saturday. There was always football in the house with her father being a Wolves fan and her brother being a Chelsea fan and she just loved football.

She is very passionate about Brentford FC and a very entertaining interview about her experience of a fan being more than just the football, enjoying the 'banter' with other fans and with the away supporters.

Jo talks about how in the early years there were a lot fewer supporters but there was more of a buzz and more atmosphere in the ground. With each local pub being packed before the game with both Brentford and away fans, with the 'banter' being sometimes friendly and sometimes not.

Jo describes a few of the characters and the friendships that she has formed over the years with great fondness, how they used to all play football together from different estates and how she took them along to the game for the first time - getting an unofficial '2 for 1' at the turnstiles.

For her it wasn't a big issue being a girl going to watch football even though there were very few women there, she was always a tomboy and was just one of the gang. Apart from the facilities in the Royal Oak were diabolical and the toilets were literally in a shed.

She recalls that racism in the 70's was a lot worse than it is today but thinks it's still here. Having close black friends she talks about how they were treated and experiences they had. She always stood up for her friends when there was any form of abuse, being a firm believer that we are all equal and it was wrong that her mate Billy couldn't stand where he wanted to.

Violence was there in the early days, but wasn't as bad as other clubs. Jo talks throughout quite openly that she did get involved but not necessarily proud of it and feels quite embarrassed looking back.

She talks about how the adrenaline made the game more fun and created some underlying tension. She describes how it was planned sometimes, but others it was about defending herself maybe starting from a bit of banter that would get out of hand.

She was part of a large crowd and if chairs would be flying past she would be caught up in the moment and did take a few punches and kicks.

It wasn't a nice time as some people were only going to the football for a fight and have lots of beers afterwards, but for her the football came first. Eventually she and her girlfriends did move away from the trouble to a different part of the ground and she is a different person now and doesn't want to be remembered in that way.

Asked about how she felt as a woman attending games at that time, she felt that she was part of the group and that she and her friends were respected as they could stand their ground if any trouble happened.

Over the years she has travelled home and away with her friends and family thinking that she is 'mad' to be so besotted with Brentford.

The away games were described as 'good days out with the banter', especially when they had the full trains of Brentford fans when you could walk up and down the train and have a drink and mix with everyone. Including 'Official unofficial' trips organised by Billy who couldn't go straight to the ground, she talks about ice skating, being on a barge, Chomp bars, T-shirts and magical mystery weekend to Lake district after playing Chester on a Friday night.

The social side is still very important to Jo even though she no longer stands, which is something she really misses. She refers to 'Griffin Park' as the old girl being very close knit and like a family; she is still part of a strong fan base and loves being part of the community.

For Jo early club rivalry wasn't with London clubs but more with Swindon and Birmingham only in the later years has it become more of a rivalry with Fulham especially as her husband is a Fulham fan and will be part of the banter if he comes to the pub 'Bee's up Fulham down'.

When talking about the new stadium she understands why the move is needed but she loves the uniqueness and quaintness of Griffin Park and doesn't really want to be playing with only 6-7K fans in division 2 in a larger stadium. She was gutted that she didn't get to say goodbye to Griffin Park during Covid and was hoping for some sort of send-off to the players.

Her proudest moment was the '92 promotion when it was a good time to be a Brentford Fan and stated that any of the playoffs were the least favourite and walking out of Wembley feeling terrible.

Her final description of being a Brentford fan was - laughter, tears, family, good fun and football. A pretty unique set of people.