

Time to Think

Open University Journeys in British and Irish prisons during the years of conflict, 1972-2000

Oral History interview clip transcript

Name of Interviewee: **Mary McArdle**

Interviewed by: **Jenny Meegan**

Date of interview: **24/08/2011**

Important

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Clip title: A strip search and its impact on Open University study

Duration: 00:01:58

Clip start point in full interview: 00:17:20

Clip end point in full interview: 00:19:18

Interview identifier: 041_S_01

Description:

Mary McArdle describes the sense of achievement and confidence gained from her studies in prison and the impact of a strip search of Republican women in Maghaberry in the 1990s on her study of 'Crime, Justice and Society'.

Transcript:

...whenever you complete it and you pass it and you feel that sense of achievement then you know that you can carry on and do the rest of the courses.

So that gave you the confidence to tackle the rest of the courses?

Yes it did, and that is not to say the rest of it was plain sailing because it did have its ups and downs. I mean for instance in the middle of, during the year I did the 'Crime, Justice and Society' course [D310] was the time that the prison administration conducted a mass strip search and physical assault of all of the women. I supposed it switched nearly back to how I had been on the outside and my feelings about education was that it wasn't my priority then. We had actually been physically attacked and forcibly strip searched, over twenty two women, and it actually, it just, it was like changed the whole nature and the whole environment of the jail. After that attack women were left feeling vulnerable and very upset and our priority was campaigning around that issue for the next lot of months. So I did that course, I did complete it, I finished the course but throughout that whole time your focus was on campaigning against strip searches and highlighting the issue and you know it just didn't seem that much of a priority in the scheme of things.

But despite not being a priority you did finish the course and you did do the work, I mean you didn't drop out of it?

No, no I didn't and yes, again it was an enjoyable course and again the tutor was a supportive tutor who was able to come in to the jail, so in that sense it was fine but it was just one of those difficult years for us as political prisoners in jail...