The Greens (WA)

30th Anniversary History Project

[*1990-2020*]

An interview with:

Ms CHRISTABEL CHAMARETTE

4th June 2020 at her home in Fremantle

The Greens (WA) acknowledge that First Nations peoples, as the original inhabitants of this country, have a special cultural and spiritual connection with the land and water. We believe that their rights and responsibilities as owners and custodians must be respected.
We hold that First Nations peoples have a right to self-determination and political representation, and must be partners in the development and implementation of public policies, programs and services that affect them.
This interview was recorded on Noongar land and the Greens (WA) acknowledge that these lands were stolen and sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

INTERVIEWER
David Worth, Greens (WA) History Project Working Group.

TRANSCRIBER
Chilla Bulbeck, Emerita Professor, The University of Adelaide, Greens (WA) History Project Working Group.

NOTES TO READERS
FULL CAPITALS in the text indicate a word or words emphasised by the interviewee.

Square brackets [ ] are used for insertions not in the original recording.

INTERVIEW DISCLAIMER
This is a near verbatim interview, meaning that the transcript follows natural speech patterns. Readers should be aware that how we speak may differ greatly from how we would write and that the evolution of everyday language and speech patterns also provides valuable insight into the culture and history of a place.

INTERVIEWEE RIGHTS AND RESEARCHER ACCESS

INTRODUCTION

Ms Christabel Chamarette was born in Hyderabad India in 1948 and travelled at an early age with her parents to Perth. She completed all of her schooling and university studies in Perth.

Christabel was WA's second Greens Senator, replacing Jo Vallentine when she retired in late 1991. She completed a 5-year term but wasn't returned to the Senate in 1996. She worked closely with Greens (WA) Senator Dee Margetts in improving the first *Native Title Act*, which had flowed from the historic Mabo decision in the High Court in 1992. They held the balance of power in the Senate and both Senators were also instrumental in improving the working of the Federal Parliament, especially its sitting hours.

Christabel was a foundation member of The Greens (WA) having been very active in the Alternative Coalition prior to its merger with three other groups in January 1990. She had stood for the Alternative Coalition in the 1989 State election and had also stood for a position on the Fremantle Council.

Prior to her parliamentary career, Christabel worked as a clinical psychologist, including in Fremantle prison for 10 years. Subsequent to her leaving Parliament she has focused on her professional work as a clinical psychologist. She maintained her membership of the Greens (WA) until 2003 when it joined the Australian Greens.

TRANSCRIPT SUMMARY

TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:01] DW: My name is David Worth. It's Thursday, the 4th of June 2020, and I'm with Christabel Chamarette, in her home, doing an interview for the WA Greens History Project. Thank you, Christabel, for having me in your house.

CHAMARETTE: My pleasure.

DW: We're doing this project and firstly, we'd like to learn a little bit about your early life, where you were born and when.

CHAMARETTE: I was born in 1948 in Hyderabad, in India, and it was just after partition and all the unrest with Gandhi's assassination, et cetera. And it was not a good place to be living as part of the British Raj. My father was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Nizam's army[1]. And my mother was a teacher in the Nizam's court. At that stage, I think the Nizam was the richest person in the world. And of course, the Nizam's territory was Muslim in the middle of a Hindu country.

And so 'Partition'[2], so a bit of unrest. And in 1951, my parents decided that for my future really, they ought to leave India. They would have been happy to stay, I'm sure. But I was born late in their life. My mother was 45 and my father was 55, at least, probably more when I was born. And my mother's sisters had come out to Perth. So they chose to migrate to Perth, Western Australia, when I was three years old. We came by boat to Fremantle.

DW: So there's a link to here rather than, say, to Britain, to return to Britain?

CHAMARETTE: Yes, definitely. And both my mother and father had been born in India. My father's family had French ancestry that went from France in the time of the Huguenots to Scotland and then to India. And my mother's family had spent generations of time in India. So really, if it hadn't been for me, they wouldn't have chosen to come to Australia. But they decided as a girl growing up, it would be better for me.

DW: And did you have any siblings?

CHAMARETTE: I had three half brothers, on both sides. My mother and father had only married the year before I was born. They'd known each other all their lives and both of them had been married. My mother had had two boys before she was 24. And my father had a son as well. So my youngest half-brother was 18 years old when I was born, and the oldest was 35. So a big gap. And I didn't have much to do with them.

DW: And they stayed in India when the rest of the family came here?

CHAMARETTE: Yes, yes. Only my mother and father and I came.

DW: Did you then do your schooling here in Perth as well?

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[1] The Nizams ruled Hyderabad, the capital and largest city of the Indian state of Telangana and the de jure capital of Andhra Pradesh, from the 18th-through-20th-century. Their army filled the main section of the Hyderabad State Forces from 1724 to 1948. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyderabad_State_Forces

[2] The Partition of India of 1947 was the division of then-British India into two independent dominion states, India and Pakistan. The Dominion of India is today the Republic of India; the Dominion of Pakistan is today the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_India

CHAMARETTE: Yes, all of it. All at the one school, which was Perth College in Mount Lawley. It was an Anglican nuns' school. Church of the Sacred Mission, I think. No, no. Sorry. No, that was the men's thing, the Sacred Mission, it was the CSC [Community of the Sisters of the Church] school anyway. It was an Anglican church school and we did have Anglican nuns there. And they were there almost until I finished school. And I went straight from kindergarten in about '53 to leaving in 1965.

DW: Did you do your education in an Anglican school because your parents were Anglican and it was important to them?

CHAMARETTE: My mother was Anglican and she had gone to an Anglican nuns' school in India, in Poona, the Wantage sisters. St Mary's, Poona[3]. So she was looking for a school that I could go to that was similar to hers. And they bought a house just around the corner from the school so I could walk to school.

DW: During your childhood and early teenage years, did you travel back to India at all with your family?

CHAMARETTE: No.

DW: So once you'd left, that was it.

CHAMARETTE: Until later when I was married and went back to visit. Much, much later [1974].

DW: Do you have any clear memories of hobbies and important interests you had while you were at Perth College?

[00:04:24] **CHAMARETTE:** I was a very avid reader and I was a bit precocious. I was an only child and I had elderly parents. I used to spend a lot of time reading and my favorite books were on my mother's shelves. So I really loved reading … I'd read all of Shakespeare and Byron and things like that by the time I was eight or nine. Not understanding, of course, because, you know, as a child. I remember reading *The Rape of Lucretia* and thinking, oh, that's interesting. What's that all about? And yeah, so I read a lot.

My favourite books when I was 10 [years old] was *Wuthering Heights* and *Pride and Prejudice*. I was kind of a teacher's pet in the early days, and my kindergarten teacher and grade one teacher used to call me Princess and that was because the story was very similar. My father used to come in his kind of khaki shirts from his Lieutenant Colonel days and deliver me to kindergarten and pick me up because he was too old to get a job in Australia. And my mother was working as a kindergarten teacher. And so my father would drop me off looking for all the world like that story about the princess. So they used to call me Princess. The reason I mention it is I think I made the mistake, I'm making the mistake again of telling my staff that story. And so they used to secretly call me Princess. And that was in the Senate office. That used to be our code, secret code. Princess.

DW: That's a nice memory to have, though.

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[3] Now known as Pune, it is the second largest city in the Indian State of Maharashtra, after Mumbai, and the eighth most populous city in India. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pune

CHAMARETTE: Oh, yes, it was. And I learned to read before I went to school. I was quite precocious.

DW: With those interests and your ability in terms of literature, was it clear that you'd go on to university after high school?

CHAMARETTE: Absolutely. My mother said, well, my mother thought I was a child prodigy. I don't think I was, but she was convinced I was and she was sure I was going to be a Latin scholar like her great grandfather. And I did study Latin at school and at uni, actually. But no, it was never questioned. I think when I was seven, I decided I wanted to be a famous author, had to be famous, you know, when you're a child. I wanted to be like Emily Bronte and Jane Austen, etc, because I aspired to that.

DW: And was it your parents' view you'd go to university here in Perth rather than say to Britain or Sydney?

CHAMARETTE: We didn't … we didn't think about it. There was only one university in Western Australia. See, things happened. When I was seven, I came out when I was five, and when I was seven, my father had a stroke and was paralyzed down his right side. And he lost his speech and he lost [movement in] his right hand [and leg], you know. And so he became an invalid and he was at home. And he died the week before my 16th birthday. So it was … it was quite a difficult life, I'm sure, for my Mum.

The first two years after his stroke, after school, I used to go with [my mother] on the train to Shenton Park Rehab [Rehabilitation Hospital] and back every day to visit him for two years before he came home. My mother was very … I'm sure she was a gifted teacher in India. And she was a brilliant kindergarten teacher for 12 years at Guildford Kindergarten. And I forget why I was going to tell you that.

Oh, that's right. So I don't think we were well off, and financially, I'm sure they struggled enormously, but never enough not to put me into this private school and pay for me. I got a scholarship when I was in fourth year [in high school], which relieved the burden of paying my school fees for the final year. And I think that, it was one of these aptitude scholarships rather than academic record scholarships. And I'm sure that the Principal at the time at the school put me in because she knew I'd just been orphaned (sic). My father had just died and that it would be tricky [financially for us]. Yeah, so I don't think we ever thought beyond Western Australia and UWA. It was the only university in Western Australia at the time.

DW: Those years at university would have coincided with the Vietnam War and the Moratoriums [anti-war marches]. Did politics overtake you then or was it later in life?

[00:09:15] **CHAMARETTE:** I was deplorably ignorant of politics, deplorably ignorant. I'd become a … I was a part of the Anglican Church all my life. But I became a kind of evangelical Christian around university days. And I used to go to the Christian, it used to be called the Evangelical Union. Nowadays it's called the Christian Union at uni. And I was very sheltered from political activity, very much more into the French club and drama and music and things like that.

I began in the Arts [faculty] and at that stage, when I started university, I wanted to be a journalist. And I chose a double major in English. And I threw in a psychology and a philosophy unit because I thought journalists should be able to sprout psychological and [philosophical] terms. And I also did French because you needed a language. But then I

got so fed up with the English Department, and I changed my mind and decided to become a psychologist because I thought that would be more useful. So then I did a double major in psychology and philosophy, for four years and the fourth year was a kind of Master's prelim.

Then I had a year working with intellectually handicapped children and adults in an interim year. And then I did my Master's degree in clinical psychology, and it was the only clinical psychology degree in Australia at that time. There were eight places for over 200 applicants. I didn't get in the first year. I got in in the second year and I got bonded to the Prisons Department. And so when I was 23 [years old] I went for the first time to Fremantle Prison, which was a male maximum security prison, as a clinical psychologist and I was the only woman working there at the time in the prison.

And basically that radicalized me. I'd had a very sheltered Christian and rather old-fashioned and kind of split cultural [background]. My culture at school was Australian and there were lots of wealthy families at Perth College. And my mother and father brought all their Indian heritage with them. So we lived a kind of British Raj-type existence and, you know, Anglo-Indian kind of home regime.

So I had a cultural split while I was going to school, and I repressed it a bit. But it came to light later when I married and worked in Bangladesh. So at 23, I went to work in Fremantle Prison and worked there, in the end for ten years over the next 15 years. And that made me into a prison reform activist. I was very, very much influenced by Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*[4]*,* which I'd also read when I was about seven, and I reread when I was in the prison system.

And that's [Fremantle Prison] where I met my first Aboriginal people, and made my first Aboriginal friends, and my specialty at that stage was working with everybody who's in prison for homicide, for murder. I was working on death row because the death penalty hadn't been abolished at that stage. And so that was my work, working with men who were in prison for violent crimes.

DW: That must have been an incredibly stressful and emotional period for a young person working there. Did you sort of question what you could offer them?

CHAMARETTE: Absolutely. The minute I got there, I realized I knew nothing at all even though I'd had six years at university. No, I really learned so much from each of them. And often when I talk about what I've learned over the years, I attribute it to all the people that I saw who told me the story of their lives and helped me to understand how they'd come to be in a place like that.

The most stressful aspect of being in the prison was actually not with the prisoners, it was with the officers because they didn't want a woman working there, and they hated me. And they would say things like, 'Well, why should we do that for you? We hate you. We don't want you here'. But that was a real favour to me because it made the prisoners realize I wasn't a threat. You know, they had thought, 'Oh, maybe this is some kind of super screw in disguise, a young woman to kind of suss us out'. And the minute they saw how badly I was treated by the prison officers, they felt a sense of unity, that they were on my side and I was there for them.

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[4] *Les Misérables* is a French historical novel by Victor Hugo, first published in 1862, that is considered one of the greatest novels of the 19th century. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Mis%C3%A9rables

DW: And your office was at Fremantle Prison?

CHAMARETTE: Yeah, it was in the prison. I was the first person working there full time, first woman. I was in one part of the prison. I had a colleague, [Peter Dunlop], who was up in the prison hospital but because you had to be escorted everywhere and everything was locked, I never saw him while we were at work. Well not much anyway. Yeah. So I didn't feel particularly useful in the early days. I really learned so much. I learned how useless prison is, and I became an abolitionist. I also learned how badly over-represented Aboriginal people were in the system.

So I think I can rightly say I was radicalized by that experience. And so that was from 1971 to '76. I got married in '72 to a doctor, Doug Bridge. So my name was actually Bridge for a while when I got married and stayed Bridge until I actually went into the Senate. So if you're looking for stuff about me [in the media], it'll be under Bridge not Chamarette.

DW: We'll get back to it later, but a lot of the early Alternative Coalition material refers to you as Christabel Bridge.

[00:15:39] **CHAMARETTE:** I remember when I stood for pre-selection for the [Greens (WA)] Senate ticket, I said to them, and I don't think it was the first time. When I was on the ticket with Jo Vallentine and Gladys Yarran, I was Bridge, I think.

DW: Yes.

CHAMARETTE: But when I went for preselection for Jo's vacancy, I made the announcement that if I won that I would change my name back to my maiden name of Chamarette because there was no point being Bridge any longer. It was my professional name and my married name, but [I was divorced and] my husband had remarried. And so I made that announcement, and so I did. And all the press thought that was weird.

I remember Brendan Nicholson[5] coming to see me and he said, 'Did you make up this name?' Because, you know, it was quite fashionable in those days to be hippie enough. And I said, 'No, that's my original name'. I used to call myself Chris Bridge in the prison because it seemed so much simpler than Christabel. And I used to call myself Chris at school too, to disguise the fact that it was Christabel. I didn't come to love my name for a long time. Why was I telling you about that?

DW: We just talked a little bit about that experience in the prison, but also at university. In those days and then early '70s, one of the I suppose common experiences was for Australian young people to look at traveling overseas, you know, via India, Afghanistan to Europe. You never had that?

CHAMARETTE: I was too young. No, we were too poor, really. I remember I got a Commonwealth Scholarship, and I remember in those days it was $17, $18 a week and my board at St Catherine's College [at UWA] was $17 a week. So I used to work, from the minute I stopped uni to the minute uni started, in the holidays in Claremont Mental Hospital

[5] A journalist who in 2020 was the defence editor of *The Australian* newspaper. When Christabel was in the Senate Mr Nicholson worked for *The West Australian* newspaper. See https://www.linkedin.com/in/brendan-nicholson-3a216324/?originalSubdomain=au

and then in Longmore Juvenile Detention Centre[6], and things like that so that I would earn enough to last the years at uni.

DW: There's also quite a strong Anglo-Indian community in Perth. Were they of help to your family in terms of settling in and growing up?

CHAMARETTE: No, I think my Mum was more of a help to them because once she came out, she used to sponsor people out. And because she was one of eight children, and my father was also one of eight children, they had lots of relatives and I had lots of cousins, but they were all about 18 years older than me, because I was kind of a mezzanine child. So I had more to do with their [my cousins'] children than with them.

I was pretty alone. But there was … my Mom would have had more contact with the Anglo-Indian community than I did. And yes, no travel until I got married. Then when I got married, my husband, Doug, wanted to be a medical missionary in India. And so I remember we went overseas for the first time. I went back to … we went on a trip to Indonesia and Bangladesh and Nepal. And as soon as I hit Bangladesh. Oh, I got my first dose of culture shock … actually in Indonesia and Jakarta. I couldn't bear the poverty and the crowds and everything. And I probably had a bad reaction, culture shock. And they kept saying [in Indonesia], 'Oh, well if you're finding this difficult imagine how you're gonna be in Bangladesh', because that was in '74 I went there.

[00:19:19] **CHAMARETTE:** When we got to Bangladesh, I suddenly loved it. I felt like poverty in cities is much uglier and confronting than rural poverty. I mean, they were very poor and there was a famine, but it was a famine of pricing, not of agriculture, because Bangladesh was so fertile. But the people were poor because of maldistribution of the resources. And so I got to Bangladesh and I found it was my food of choice, my people of choice. I related well, and I felt at home and I realized that those first three or four years of my life in India had been crucial to shaping who I was.

That was when I discovered from about 28 to 30 years of age that I'd had that cultural split. I'd kind of forgotten that I was Indian, half-Indian, and thought I was Australian. And then when I went back, I re-found that part of myself and I remember at 30 feeling really whole for the first time. I realized there had been a bit of a split of trying to pretend to fit into Australian society. And that's why I think I have affinity with Aboriginal people who've been stolen, you know, the Stolen Generation, because I immediately thought, well, they're brown skinned as well. My earliest mothering experience would have been with an Indian woman who was my mother figure. My mother was brought up by a servant and so was I. And so that was my bonding. So I think it shaped my cultural identification quite a bit.

DW: How long did you spend in Bangladesh with your husband?

CHAMARETTE: We were there for four years. And I learned the language, and I loved it. It was an amazing experience.

DW: And you were working there, or assisting [your husband]?

CHAMARETTE: Yes. We went over to Liverpool [first] and did a … my husband did a tropical medicine degree for doctors and I did a tropical community health degree. And we

[6] The Longmore Detention Centre in Bentley was designed to provide secure detention for young people aged 13 to 18 years of age. It was closed and replaced by the Banksia Hill Detention Centre in 1997 due to overcrowding. See https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/wa/biogs/WE01400b.htm

did that for three months before we went to Bangladesh. I thought being a psychologist would be useless. Which it sort of was, I couldn't be a psychologist in that [non-English speaking] team. It was a health, education and economic development team in Bangladesh.

So I retrained to be a lab technician [at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. I have a CTM&H Certificate from there].I helped set up the laboratory in the hospital that we [built in the south of Bangladesh]. [picks up photo album] And then we came to set up a cottage industry there, because it was such a poor area. This is Bangladesh. And that's where we were. We were right in the middle of the Sundarban Forest[7]. And so that was some [looking through photos] … I don't think I've got anything interesting there. We had cyclones and everything, so this is, that's me working in cottage industry. And that was after I had my haircut that was working probably as lab technician, I think [rifles through more photos] … yeah, there we are.

DW: A fabulous time. I interviewed James Mumme recently who's been active [for the Greens] down at Shoalwater, and he said he met you in Bangladesh because he'd lived there for a number of years as well. So it just seems that social justice aspect of people's lives has been important for them in terms of being a Green, and choosing the Greens Party.

CHAMARETTE: Oh, absolutely. And that's why it's relevant. And even that four years that I had in Bangladesh, last night when I was thinking about talking to you about the four years in the Senate, I was thinking, it's really interesting because when I read the Senate biography, it quoted me saying [to the question], 'What did you think of the four years you spent in the Senate?' And I said, 'Well, at the time I thought it was the most important thing I was going to do in my life'. But I don't think that now. I just think it was a very interesting, very rich four years.

And of course, when I was in Bangladesh, I thought that was the most important thing I was going to do in my life. I thought I was going to be there forever. It's just that my husband got ill, so we had to come home. So we came home. And then I went back to my old job at Fremantle Prison and worked for another five years, from '80 to '85 in the prison system. And that's when my marriage broke up.

So, and so in '85 or '84, I set up a group, Clinical Psychology Private Practice with some colleagues, [John Manners and Veronica White], and went into private practice. And it was then that I suddenly started feeling … I had been working with men in the prison system. And then when I was in private practice, I was working with women who were adult survivors of child sexual abuse. And of course, all the men in the prison had been sexually abused or, you know, had violence or trauma in their childhood. And so that had helped me enormously to be able to work with women who were adult survivors.

But I began to feel in about 19… well the marriage broke up in '85. … and I was a Christian and I still am. I left the marriage. It was not the done thing for a marriage to break up, even to me. I was suicidal for many years before I did it because I felt I shouldn't. But I left the marriage and … that was when I started bicycling around Fremantle and having coffee at Gino's [coffee shop] and meeting up with people who later were instrumental in getting me into the alternative political movement.

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[7] The Sundarbans mangrove forest is one of the largest such forests in the world (140,000 ha) and lies on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal. It is adjacent to the border of India's Sundarbans World Heritage site inscribed in 1987. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sundarbans

So Di Wilkinson was important in PND. In fact, she was the first person I knew who'd worked in the peace area. Peace and nonviolence, Heather Formani and Di Wilkinson, who now is Diane Ngarti. And I used to have coffee with them, and Penny Cordell, who did the film *Take Heart*. Are you aware of that film?

DW: No.

[00:25:51] **CHAMARETTE:** You may be interested in it. It's … ask Annabelle [Newbury] or any of the others about it. It's a film about Jo and the peace movement and everything … Penny was a film maker and she made the film. It's got lots of beautiful footage of the warship [protests] stuff and everything. And I got to know her and ... she's died, unfortunately, of a brain tumour about maybe five or eight years ago. And her son told me he has a lot of her materials that went with this.

So I just thought I'd put it there to remind me, to get you to have a look at it and think about whether you want to archive some of that material, because he was saying to me, 'It's just in the shed. Can I give it to you?' And I said, yes, but I've lost track of it, and I haven't got it. But I think it'd be better in the Battye library.

DW: I think so. We are going through the process of providing material to the Battye from the Greens, so I'll have a look at that.

CHAMARETTE: Well, it's a precursor. I'd like it back.

DW: Yes, I could get that transferred probably onto a DVD or something.

CHAMARETTE: That would be lovely. I'd love it back because I haven't been able to watch it for many years. Yeah. Good.

DW: Going back to your prison time, you said that's where you started to form your political ideas and see how the system worked and how power worked. And then you had this really formative time in Bangladesh. You're back in Perth, your marriage has split up. What made you take that next step to be active in the peace movement or the environment movement? Because it's different to your social justice contribution.

CHAMARETTE: Sure.Yeah. Just a little bit more on the social justice thing. I was very active on the prison reform activism and things like that. [I helped start Prison Fellowship in 1981, Christian Justice Association and the Aboriginal Driver Training Program in 1985.] And I was involved with the Anglican Church in its response to all those issues, the Aboriginal protests, Swan Brewery protests[8] and the Deaths in Custody [Royal Commission][9]. All that was very much where I was. And I was trying to be part of the Church's response to those key issues.

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[8] In 1989, the ALP State Government vested the old Swan brewery site at the bottom of Kings Park in the building company Multiplex for a peppercorn rental, with a view to its being redeveloped as a commercial precinct. Perth's Noongar community reminded the Government of the site's ancient and sacred Indigenous significance, and established a protest camp on the site, while challenging the issue at law and seeking to have the land reclassified as a public reserve. Ultimately the protest was unsuccessful and the development of the property went ahead. The on-site protest had endured for many months and culminated in a bitter but non-violent confrontation with police on 8 January 1990 at which several arrests were made.See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swan_Brewery#1989%E2%80%9390_protest_against_redevelopment

[9] See https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22publications%2Ftabledpapers%2FHPP032016008902%22;src1=sm1

And you're quite right. The time in Bangladesh made me see the interaction between social inequity and environmental destruction. Because like those pictures I showed you, every year the place where we were living got inundated. And the maldistribution of resources meant that the poorest of the poor were the peasant farmers [working the land] for the rich 10%, [property holders]. So I began to see the connection between economics and social justice and environmental pressure on people and. But that was just there. And then my main purpose was deaths in custody and Aboriginal issues.
And then in 1987, that's why I mentioned Penny. We went to a a thing called the Harmonic Convergence[10]. I don't know if you remember it at all. On August the 17th 1987 was supposed to be, in hippie terms, the end of the main calendar of masculine influence and then the beginning of the Hopi Indian calendar and feminine influence of the planets and things like that. So as well as my Christian background and my activism, I suddenly got drawn into this kind of alternative [culture].

My first political action had been in '84. I didn't know about Jo Vallentine, didn't know about the peace movement, … I hadn't walked in the Vietnam protests or anything. But I was working in the prison and one of my colleagues rang up and said, 'Christabel, Carmen Lawrence is a psychologist. Wouldn't it be great if we could get her elected into Parliament?' So I said, 'Oh yeah, that would be good'. And he said, 'Will you come and help me? Will you come and hand out ballots at the polling booth?'

DW: How to vote [cards]?

[00:30:07] **CHAMARETTE:** Yes "How to Votes" at the polling booth. And I said, 'Oh, okay. What are "How to Votes"?' So that was my first political activity. I went and handed out how to votes. And she [Carmen] got elected and later she became Premier[11]. She was also Aboriginal Affairs Minister before that. So I was busy heckling the Labor Party in those days about what they were doing about the Swan Brewery protest and all that. So very local and not really aware of Jo and what she was doing or the peace movement, just totally wrapped up in this social justice side.

And so then in … so '87 I went with Penny Cordell and Zoe Reo and another person [Sue Gawned] to this Harmonic Convergence. And I came back. And I met up with Heather Formani, and she said [she was involved in a new political movement] … Oh just prior to this, I guess I was feeling a bit disgruntled with my work in therapy with people who'd been damaged. I wanted to kind of do something more proactive and preventative. And I thought of doing a PhD or becoming a teacher because my activism and trying to change the political system wasn't working.

Oh, that's right. I set up something called the Aboriginal Driver Training Program in 1985[12]. And I'd been part of the Prison Fellowship movement in '81 and the Christian Justice Association, which was meant to lobby for prison reform. And it wasn't getting anywhere, like it wasn't changing the world. And so I began to think just being a therapist and doing activism in my spare time was not adequate. So I thought maybe I should become a movie

[10] The name given to the world's first synchronized global peace meditation, which occurred on August 16–17, 1987. This event also closely coincided with an exceptional alignment of planets in the Solar System which occurs every 10,000 years or so. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harmonic_Convergence
[11] Was the Premier of WA from 1990 to 1993, the first woman to become the Premier of an Australian State. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carmen_Lawrence
[12] This program continues in 2020. See http://www.drd.wa.gov.au/projects/Justice/Pages/Aboriginal-Justice-Program-%E2%80%93-Enhanced-Driver-Training-and-Education-Program.aspx

maker or a lecturer in a university and get a PhD or write a book or enter politics, you know. But that was a very incidental thing.

And then we were going on this bike ride in the mornings, Heather Formani and I … I think this was about 1988, and she said, 'Oh, I've got a meeting in my house and I'm thinking of joining a political party. What do you think?' I said, 'Oh, I'd never join a political party'. And she said, 'Well, this is a political party with a difference. It's called the No Name group. And we meet by consensus decision-making. And it's very much about participatory democracy and doing politics differently'. And I said, 'Oh, well, I'd be interested in that'.

So I went to a meeting at her place. It was in Fremantle, in Carnac Street. And Jo Vallentine was there. And there was a group … there was a circle of about 35 people in her lounge room. And I was so impressed by the consensus decision-making. They asked for people to nominate for timekeeper, note keeper, facilitator. And the group set its own agenda. It was very impressive. So that won me over. I thought I love this and I want to learn as much as possible about facilitating community [activism]. You know, responses to issues, so I started attending and it then morphed. So that would have been, I think we'd be round '87, '88, maybe earlier, might have been earlier, and it morphed into … so I started going to Vic[toria] Park to a group called the Alternative Coalition.

It was actually called the Alternative Electoral Coalition in those days, because we didn't realize that AEC stood for Australian Electoral Commission. It was only when we started fielding candidates we thought AEC was a liability because people would have thought we were the Electoral Commission rather than the Alternative Electoral Coalition [so we dropped the E] and so I started going to that. …

DW: Can I just pick up on that because I have seen some agendas from around that time and the meetings do seem a bit different in terms of people bringing food, starting with a physical, perhaps exercise, just to welcome people and so on. Not as formal as meetings are now in terms of bringing the group together before we actually get onto business items. Is that something that attracted you as well?

[00:34:35] **CHAMARETTE:** I didn't notice that. It was more meetings, it wasn't food so much. I think that might have been Green Development or something else, later. But in these early days, it was much more political, there were a lot of Communist Party, ex-Communist Party people, and it was much more people like Jan Jermalinksi (JJ), Vic Williams, Vic Slater from the Maritime Workers Union and Keith Bostock, Chris Williams.

That's where I met Chris Williams at one of those meetings and we became friends. And then later we had a relationship, a bit later on. And Dennis McCarthy. A lot of people, we had alternative politics ideas and then ...

DW: Can I just break in as well, I noticed as well a number of those meetings you facilitated them? You were using your skills.

CHAMARETTE: That's what my role [was]. That's what I was captured by. I wanted to become a facilitator. And I remember, that's what I thought my role was. I remember JJ and Vic [Williams] came to visit me at my office, my psychology office. I think it was in '89 and they said, 'We want to ask you to become a political candidate'. And I said, 'Oh, no, no, I don't want to be a political candidate. I want to facilitate these meetings, I think this is really exciting' and I said 'because, you know, I love my work and I'm not free to leave it because that's my financial survival and I prefer the facilitation'.

And they said, ‘Oh, don’t worry, you’ll never be elected. It’s just that we need people to stand as candidates to be a voice for the community and for the voiceless and challenge the current political agenda so that it moves away from this health, education, housing, blah, blah, blah, to ecological integrity, social justice, peace and nuclear disarmament and participatory democracy’. And I could see the sense of that. So I said, ‘Oh, okay’. And I asked my friends … asked three of my friends, this would have been in ‘87 still, or ‘88. And all three of them said, ‘Don’t do it’.

One of them said, because I was thinking the Alternative Coalition wanted me to be a candidate either for a Lower House or Upper House [seat] in South Metro or Fremantle. And one of my friends was a bureaucrat, no, an academic, and she said, ‘No, you’ve got credibility. You’ve got a profile as a reformer and an advocate for, you know, offenders and things like that. This is a crackpot group and you’ll lose credibility if you get involved’.

The other person I asked was a bureaucrat and in the public service and she said, ‘No. Christabel, you know, you can do better things. And, you know, it’s very fringy, lunatic fringe stuff’. And I asked an ex-prisoner who I’d been helping get on his feet and he said, ‘Nah, no, don’t do it, don’t do it’. Anyway, despite the fact that all three of them said don’t do it, I said to them, ‘I do think it’s a lunatic fringe and I do think I could lose credibility, but I actually think it’s the right thing to do. I'm going to do it’. So I said yes.

And that’s when I started to, oh, that’s what we did. We started a Fremantle branch of the Alternative Coalition. And I wish I could find the days of that. But we put a tiny little free ad [advertisement] in the *Fremantle Gazette*, I think. And it said, anyone who’s interested in running a progressive candidate against David Parker come to this meeting at the Freo Ed Centre, you know, the old Princess May School and 22 people came and I was the facilitator.

That was the first meeting Dee [Margetts[13]] came to, of the Alternative Coalition. And that was the time where we chose ... That was wonderful. And that was when people who were in the peace and nuclear disarmament started coming, like Garry [and Clare] Middle and people like that. So there were 22 people and we decided to run. And Jo Hoffman was there and she was part of the Fremantle PND. So we ran Dee against David Parker for the Alternative Coalition. And I ran in the Upper House.

DW: And it’s a ticket, I think it’s the 1989 election for [the Upper House seat of] South Metro. And included Rob Mann, I think on the ticket as well?

CHAMARETTE: Yes, yeah. And Gladys Yarrran.

DW: Yes.

CHAMARETTE: A friend of mine from the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission days. Yes, have you got the brochures?

DW: We’ve got some copies of your brochures and how to votes and so on. Yes. I don’t think we have all of them, but I might take those with me. So that was your first experience of trying to run as a candidate for Parliament?

[13] Elected as Greens (WA) Senator in 1993.

[00:40:06] **CHAMARETTE:** Yes. I can't remember which I did first, whether it was Fremantle Council, or South Metro or ... [rifling through her papers] Yeah, here we are. Here's the Alternative Coalition brochure, which I was on with Rob Mann and Gladys Yarran. There we are. Jo Hoffman's friend did that poster. I think I've only got …

DW: I've got a copy of that one actually.

CHAMARETTE: Got that one? Okay. So that was, so that's how we formed it. And we got, we only got 2% of the vote, or something. But we took David Parker[14] to preferences. So that was a big victory. And then we had a meeting in Fremantle where we … I was facilitating all these meetings. David Parker spoke and he was actually the impetus to starting the Fremantle Alternative Coalition because he was so arrogant and rude.

It was actually a Fremantle PND [People for Nuclear Disarmament] meeting because we were trying to put pressure on the Labor Party … not to change the three mines policy[15]. And we invited David Parker to a meeting and, he said, 'Oh, you guys, you should stick with things you have public support for, like opposing the warship visits, you know. Don't get involved in this, changing the uranium mine numbers and things'. And we were so outraged.

That's why we put the notice in and said, 'Let's run against him'. We also had a meeting with John Dawkins[16] as well. And so I really credit David Parker with starting the Greens in Fremantle because that was so crucial, really.

DW: Well, he was, I think at the time was the Deputy Premier. Wasn't he?

CHAMARETTE: He was the Treasurer and Deputy Premier.

DW: A bit later maybe, but then ended badly, I think?

CHAMARETTE: Yes, it did end badly, but in these those days, he could, because there was all the petrochemical plants. There was the gas and coke stuff. There was a lot of corruption hidden away in Fremantle at that time.

So anyway. But so at this point, what I'm doing is I'm really interested in the movement and I'm meeting people from the Green Development and the [WA] Green Party and the Vallentine Peace Group, meeting them at various kinds of meetings. And doing facilitation, really, and thinking I'm being a candidate to kind of serve the agenda … won't mean I have to give up my work. And so that's how I was pursuing that. And I was instrumental in the merger between the four parties.

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[14] ALP member of the State Parliament for the Legislative Assembly seat of Fremantle from 1980 to 1990. Deputy Premier in the Dowding Ministry from 1988 to 1990, he later served a jail term for perjury for evidence given to the WA Inc Royal Commission. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Parker_(Australian_politician)

[15] The biennial ALP National conference in 1982 debated its opposition to uranium mining vigorously. At the 1984 Conference, the newly elected Federal Labor Government under PM Bob Hawke introduced the so-called 'three mine policy'. The policy confined uranium mining activities to the three sites already operational: Ranger, Nabarlek and Olympic Dam with a moratorium on new mines opening. Subsequently, reserves at Nabarlek were depleted and the Beverley Uranium Mine became the notional third mine. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uranium_mining_in_Australia

[16] In 1974, aged 27 years old, Dawkins was elected to the House of Representatives for the marginal seat of Tangney. He was defeated at the 1975 election. In 1977 Dawkins returned to the House as member for the safe Labor seat of Fremantle, succeeding Kim Beazley (senior). He was a Minister in all of the the Hawke and Keating Governments between 1983-1996. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dawkins

DW: So after that election in '89, that's when the groups started to get more emphasis about having come together for the 1990 Federal election and the merger, talking to ...

CHAMARETTE: Yes, yeah. But what we wanted to do was get the name 'Green' and we couldn't because the Sydney, New South Wales Greens had the registration and they had given it to the WA Green Party. OK? And the Alternative Coalition and the Vallentine Peace Group wanted to come together, and Green Development with them, but we couldn't use the word 'Green'. And that's where a whole lot of issues arose that were quite controversial because, at a certain point, and we don't know quite how, I don't know the sequence of how it happened, but we, Bob Brown got the Greens registration or something like that.

DW: Was that in Tasmania?

CHAMARETTE: I'm not sure. You should probably ask other people about this, but what happened was that we couldn't call ourselves 'The Greens', because the name was taken … whether it was by the New South Wales Greens or WA Greens or Bob Brown, I'm not sure which it was, but we couldn't. So we called us all sorts of ridiculous things like the Brocalliance, the Brocollis... You know, we were struggling because some of us didn't mind ... I loved the Alternative Coalition as a name and some of us didn't mind. We thought of being the Rainbow Coalition because there was that [group] over in Victoria. Rainbow Coalition sounded good, but too hippie, probably. And so I think we became the Green Earth Alliance or …

DW: That's right, in June '89.

[00:44:58] **CHAMARETTE:** In June '89, you think? Okay. And then we did a merger of the three or four groups with a constitution that Chris Williams wrote. And I was one of the founding members on the 1st of January [1990]. Have you got a copy of that document?

DW: We do have, yes, we do, and the people who signed it on the first of January. In terms of that year, it seems quite critical, the '89 year. How did you find the meetings, trying to bring those four groups together? Because that's pretty a unique thing to do, to bring four existing groups together.

CHAMARETTE: Yeah, well. I think it was … we were just, we were happy doing what we were doing, this is the Alternative Coalition, and we were setting up subgroups all around Western Australia in the regions, and Green Development [based in the SW of WA] was a bit standoffish and a bit suspicious about us and what we were doing. And the Green Party was very small and was just, and a bit suspicious as well of the Vallentine Peace Group. Jo and the Vallentine Peace Group had the Senate representation, which was wonderful, the Parliamentary registration thing.

So that was quite an interesting period, but I think Petra Kelly's[17] visit was the most significant moment of coming together because I'm pretty sure, she'd been visiting Australia and I'm pretty sure Jo's office organized her to visit the Octagon [UWA]. And I went to the airport to pick her up and drop her back with Gert [Bastian, her partner, to their hotel afterwards]. And she spoke at the Octagon. We had about 800 people. And a week

[17] Ms Kelly was a Green politician and ecofeminist activist and was a founding member of the German Green Party, the first Green party to rise to prominence both nationally in Germany and worldwide. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petra_Kelly

later, the Greens wrote to me and said, 'We will agree to a merger'. I've got a letter from them. Do you have a copy of that letter?

DW: We don't have that letter. I've seen other letters. But that's interesting.

CHAMARETTE: From Laurie Capill.

DW: You see that as the trigger point? In September '89, she [Petra Kelly] comes to Perth and has that Octagon meeting?

CHAMARETTE: Definitely the turning point, because up to the time of that, there was a standoff between all the different groups. And after that, Laurie Capill with the [WA] Green Party said, 'We will give you the registration, in exchange for, if you cover our debts and stuff like that', because they came with a debt. Jo came with her Parliamentary position, Green Development was covering the South West and the Alternative Coalition was doing everything else, all the other local groups. And so we had a very detailed merger document and the Constitution was written, and then we had our launch on the 1st of January 1990 in the Sunken Gardens [at UWA] and Kim Herbert and I were kind of co-chairs, Kim Herbert on behalf of the [WA] Green Party, and me on behalf of the Green Earth Alliance.

And that got a lot … I've lost all the footage of that. It's in TV footage. The news of the day on all Channel Seven, Channel Nine, Channel Ten and the ABC, they all covered the launch on the 1st of January in different ways. The only reason I'm remembering that is we looked at all this tiny footage about it and then the Channel Ten covered it as the marriage. It was a marriage ceremony and there was Kim Herbert and me as though we were bride and groom! It was really hilarious. So that's why I remember it. But I've lost all those clippings.

DW: One interesting thing for me, looking back, is that the Constitution, the first one which everyone agreed to quite rapidly after September '89 through to January 1990. The key elements are still in the current Constitution. Things like reliance on consensus decision-making, the Reps Council, Regional Groups, the Electoral Committee to choose people to stand as candidates. So over 30 years, that's fantastic that that document, the key parts of it, stayed the same.

CHAMARETTE: Yes, yeah. But that's interesting because isn't that the Australian Greens constitution now?

DW: The WA Greens Constitution I think is different to the Australian Greens. They have both had their own Constitutions, my understanding, I could be wrong.

[00:49:38] **CHAMARETTE:** I don't know. The Greens (WA) had its own Constitution and I went to a Constitution meeting on the East Coast. I went with Jim Scott[18] and Nadine Lapthorne to this meeting where there was a guy … Bob Brown was there, Drew Hutton was there. But there was a guy named Malcolm [Potter], I can't remember his surname, a lawyer. And we discussed the Constitution we had done, and I was very process oriented.

[18] Elected as the Greens (WA)'s first member of the WA's Legislative Council in 1993 for the South Metropolitan seat. He served until 2005. See https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/library/MPHistoricalData.nsf/(Lookup)/264B07171A3FA538482577E50028A7B3?OpenDocument

I very much didn't feel I could support anything that I didn't have the group's support on. So we went to that meeting and I knew that I had support from WA to join the Australian Greens under a Constitution that brought all the local groups together and defined the powers of the national body. And we went and we argued it out and they agreed and we did that, and then they sent us the minutes. And instead [Malcolm Potter] had redrafted it so that the reserve powers were with the national body, not with the regional body. And that meant it was not supportable, in my view.
My problem was that neither Jim or Nadine understood the [legal] subtlety. And Bob Brown said something which was quite wrong, which was 'We've given you all the power you want because we've defined each of the State's branch's powers, the reserve powers being with the Australian Greens'. But our point was we wanted to define the national body's powers and keep the reserve powers with the States. That's where my falling out with the Australian Greens began.

And that's why I always voted against joining the Australian Greens until they were able to change the Constitution to reflect the powers being in the grassroots part of the movement and the national body, having all the powers that we wanted to give it to work, a bit like the federation, we were a federation model. We went taking a federation constitution, and we came back with a mainstream political party constitution.

DW: It seems from the documents I've seen that period from the launch of the party in January 1990 almost through to you getting in the Senate in '92, a lot of the effort was around that question of whether the Greens WA should join the national party. Lots of meetings, discussions. I think Chris Williams also drafted the Constitution?

CHAMARETTE: Yeah, he did.

DW: How did you feel about all that focus going on that issue, rather than on other issues?

CHAMARETTE: Oh, it was fine, because that's what we were trying to do. We were trying to be a different political party, not a standard new version of the Labor Party or the Liberal Party [or the Democrats]. We were trying to actually embody, like Petra Kelly and *Die Grunen* [German Greens] we wanted to do something that was actually more like the Greens, the German Greens, not like the Labor Party.

But the problem is, of course, when you're in Western Australia, where did your membership come from? It comes from the Labor Party, or the Democrats, or a few of them from the Liberals. So everybody's got this party political view, which if you remember my first conversation on the bicycle, I was never committed to that. I was only ever committed to a political process [of doing politics differently] and a process of transformation because I was highly influenced by these books… I brought them out … [walks away from microphone]

So here I am. I was very much interested in Fritjof Capra[19], and I think I put him in my first [Parliamentary] speech as well. But I was interested in the fact that this civilization was on its way out because of its dependence on fossil fuels, and the patriarchy, and corrupt political processes. And what we needed to do was form a new movement, a paradigm shift. So that was happening in my political thinking, in my Christian thinking. I was very

[19] An Austrian-born American physicist, systems theorist and deep ecologist. In 1995, he became a founding director of the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California. Capra is the author of several books, including *The Tao of Physics* (1975), *The Turning Point* (1982), *Uncommon Wisdom* (1988) and *The Web of Life* (1996). See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritjof_Capra

influenced by Matthew Fox[20], who also, the same year Petra Kelly visited, Matthew Fox visited.

DW: Visited Perth?

[00:54:05] **CHAMARETTE:** It might have been 1990, it might have been after because I think Matthew Fox was there on the day we had the election of the Greens (WA) Senator. And Jo won it. And I was second on the ticket and Gladys [Yarran] was third. But during the day, Matthew Fox had come and he was talking about the paradigm shift, to see nature in a new way, a shift of vision, a transformation and a new way of working [care for the Earth].

So a shift from anthropocentrism to a living cosmology, from Newton to Einstein, compartmentalism to wholeness, rationalism to mysticism, obedience as - this is old paradigm, obedience as a prime moral virtue to creativity as a prime moral virtue, from personal salvation to communal healing, to compassion from theism, God outside us to pantheism. God is in us and us in God, from full redemption to creation-centered, from religion to spirituality, from the ascetic to the aesthetic.

So I had been reading that, I went to the Matthew Fox thing, then we went to the election thing and I spoke and I remember Jo spoke. I remember Jo speaking to me afterwards and saying, 'You should have won that election. You should, because you're fresh. You're fresh and new'. I don't know what I said, but anyway she said that to me, which touched me really because I thought she was marvelous. And I thought it was wonderful that she got the top of the ticket, and I didn't mind. We were the first Senate ticket that only consisted of women. And we had an Aboriginal woman on our ticket as well. So that was lovely. Oh, yeah. *The Soul of Politics* [by Jim Wallis was another inspiring book].

So spirituality was very much a part of this new paradigm for me. That's Petra Kelly … I aspired to what Petra Kelly was saying on her visit. So things like transpersonal ecology. Now, I was on a learning curve on environmental issues. I realized, I was part of the mineral sands protests and things. I went down [south] and met June [Lowe] at one of the Green Development protests. It was about mineral sands, I think. And then there was the forests issues and things. Yes. So that's the sort of values I was coming from. And I loved going to the Green Development meetings and things.

DW: The next step in your career and membership of the Greens is obviously Jo decided to step down after winning the 1990 Senate seat.

CHAMARETTE: And she told us, she told us when she stood, 'I'm not going to finish the term'. We knew that. And then in that year … so she started in 1990, and then in '91 she decided to retire. And she mentioned to me that she was deciding to retire. And I knew, I mean, I was aware I was second on the ticket, but even though that's the old way of replacing people, you know the Labor Party and Liberals, I didn't have any investment in that. And I thought that the Greens should vote again for whoever was to succeed Jo Vallentine.

[20] An American priest and theologian. Formerly a member of the Dominican Order within the Catholic Church, he became a member of the Episcopal Church following his expulsion from the order in 1993. Fox has written 35 books that have been translated into 68 languages and have sold millions of copies. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Fox_(priest)

But Jo did mention it to me, and I set up a little group to advise me as to whether I should do it or not, because that was the first time when it ever [became a possibility]. I never wanted to be in Parliament and I never wanted to be a politician. And that was the first time that it became a possible reality of replacing her. So I remember gathering together a little group, mainly from the Alternative Coalition, I think, or just ordinary people and saying, 'What is the point? Is it better for me to stay doing what I'm doing and be part of the movement or to offer myself on this?' So I did. I stood and put my name forward.

I think we had six candidates, three men, three women. And I was selected to replace Jo. And that was in October … October 31st, 1991. And then there was this whole long delay about [Premier] Carmen Lawrence appointing me, even though the Parliament did sit for one day. I was in the Parliament [public gallery] that day but she refused to put up my name as a replacement because [the Parliament] were doing the three strikes legislation[21], which was scandalous legislation for juveniles, three strikes and mandatory imprisonment, and the Marandoo mining approval was going ahead[22].

So in retrospect, I'm very glad she didn't appoint me on that day. But because she didn't appoint me on that day, it meant I missed the first sitting, the first two weeks sitting in Parliament [and got no wages for myself and my staff for 6 weeks].

DW: In Federal Parliament? So the State Parliament needs to approve you as a replacement?

CHAMARETTE: Yes.

DW: And then you go to the Federal Parliament?

CHAMARETTE: The Federal Parliament, yes. So by the time the Federal Parliament resumed, I was still not appointed by the State and had no money. Jo had done a lovely thing. She did a transfer.

I'm going to be interrupted in a minute. Can we have a break?

DW: [Interview interrupted]
We've just had a break and now are back talking about your transition into the Federal Senate after Jo Vallentine has resigned, retired as Senator. And that was I suppose a year before the election gives us a new Senator, a bit of a chance to settle in? Before the … it was the election in '93 that Dee Margetts was elected.

[01:00:25] **CHAMARETTE:** Yes, but we didn't know that at the time. It wasn't for that. It was because she [Jo Vallentine] couldn't do any more. She knew she'd do two years of the six. And that was it.

DW: A six-year term?

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[21] In 1992, the ALP State Government passed the first mandatory sentencing legislation for car theft, followed by the "three strikes" laws in 1996 for home burglaries. Members of WA's Indigenous communities have been incarcerated in even greater numbers as a result of these laws. In 2019 Indigenous children in WA were 49 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in detention. See https://www.lawsocietywa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Law-Society-Briefing-Papers-Mandatory-Sentencing.pdf

[22] Marandoo iron ore mine owned by Rio Tinto was formerly located in the Karijini National Park until it was excised in 1991 by the ALP State Government to allow mining operations to commence. An associated rail corridor was also excised from the National Park. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marandoo_mine

CHAMARETTE: Yes, she did want me to get in and do four years and presumably it would have been lovely to have got elected at the end of that. Not that I wanted to stay much longer, but I wanted to do the same thing she did, which was hand over mid-term, which is what most people do. But, yeah.

DW: Did she also give you a bit of mentoring about the life of being a Senator from Perth, and the pressures?

CHAMARETTE: And yes, she gave me … she took me over to Canberra for an orientation course for four days. And that's where I … That's when I really got my first glimpse of Canberra. I don't think I'd ever been there before. And it was the weekend that Hawke and Keating were having their big barney [challenge for PM], when I was there for the orientation to Jo's office. Peter Jones was there, and Annabelle [Newbury] [and maybe Trish Cowcher] were there.

And I went with Jo Trevelyan and at that stage, I'd stopped working in my private practice at the end of '91 when I knew I was going to be there in '92. So I worked up to '91 in the private practice. And my staff who applied to work for me, who were selected, all worked for six weeks for nothing.

DW: I think you had four Senate staff as a team. Can you remember their names?

CHAMARETTE: I was allocated, as any single Senator is allocated, three electoral officers and a personal assistant. And those three positions I divided four ways to cover the portfolio areas. So I had Veronica Vann as economics and women's issues, Alan [Carter] might have been for environment. So Veronica Vann, Alan Carter, Theo Mackay, and Bryan Connell- he was the office manager. So I had the office manager and I had, Theo Mackay was social justice, and peace and nuclear disarmament [adviser] because he was part of that. Alan Carter was environment and Veronica Vann was women's issues and economics. So they were my advisors.

And then for my personal assistant position, I divided it two thirds and one third. And there was Colette Keane, who was one third in Canberra at my Canberra office. She was a person from Canberra. And Cathcart Weatherly was the two-thirds person. Peter Jones was the one who recommended Cathcart and Collette and later, Andrew Donovan, who later worked for me, but not in that first lot, because he knew them from Tasmania and from the Wilderness Society.

So Cathcart drove over from the Wilderness Society in Tassie, his first visit to Western Australia to join my team as PA. And he was the only one on my team who had any political experience because he'd worked with Norm Sanders[23]. And then he'd worked with Bob Brown, and then he'd worked with the Wilderness Society. So he was very active in the Tasmanian Greens.

DW: And your other staff, like Veronica and Alan, they had been Greens members, so they had knowledge of the party and you, and so on?

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[23] Sanders represented the Australian Democrats in the Tasmanian House of Assembly from 1980 to 1982 and then the Senate from 1985 to 1990. The decision by the Tasmanian Labor Government to dam the Franklin River led him to become one of the leaders of the movement opposed to the proposed dam. His election to the Tasmanian House of Assembly made him Australia's first parliamentarian ever to be elected on a specifically environmental platform. In Parliament, he was a key player in the campaign to save the Franklin River. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norm_Sanders

CHAMARETTE: Alan had been part of the Alternative Coalition almost from its beginning, certainly from the Fremantle election when I stood against Jim McGinty. And oh, that was quite a successful State election, but that was the Alternative Coalition. So he was … Alan was part of the Alternative Coalition. Theo was part of the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission and Veronica was part of Green Development. And she was from Bunbury and she [experienced in] the women's movement and environment movement. She knew everybody in the South West.

DW: In your role as Senator, a lone Senator at that stage for any Greens in Australia, how did you decide about how you'd work? Would you talk on every bill and every topic or would you just choose certain bits of legislation to talk on?

[01:05:17] **CHAMARETTE:** Well, in the beginning, when I took over from Jo, it was 1992 and I was a lone Senator. It meant that I was powerless. Like, well Jo had been powerless, too, but she'd been very impressive. What Jo had done was she tended to have wonderful speeches. She tended to work in the community more and on campaigns, I think. And she wasn't a parliamentary politician, really, but she had a very important role in doing adjournment speeches[24]. She'd go and deliver these long diatribes that Peter Jones had written for her and speak on all the issues that were her key platforms. And I didn't realize, but it totally pissed everyone off.

DW: In Parliament?

CHAMARETTE: In Parliament, yes. And I discovered that when I got there, because the minute I stood up to say I was going to make an adjournment speech, they all went 'Uuurrh, yee-ees, bluurrhh'. And [laughs] then I discovered what it was because in those days when I first went there, Parliament sat from 2:00 pm till 11 pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and adjournment started at 11:00 pm. And it went for as long as any Senator spoke. And there were no time limits on the speeches. So Jo would occasionally speak for half an hour at the end of the day, the working day and everyone, and depending where she was listed on the adjournment, everybody had to keep waiting there, including the staff. Not that the staff booed or hissed, they thought she was wonderful, but they didn't like the hours and the politicians were very unhappy with it.

So anyway, I knew that I was, as far as I was concerned … Jo was the first Greens Senator in Australia. And it was really wonderful. And she got us there really because of her reputation as an independent Senator for peace. And also when she first stood [for the NDP]. So she'd opened the door into Parliament. But she wasn't a Parliamentary person. She was an activist. And so they kept asking me, was I expecting to be locked up and everything? And I said, no, Jo got us in here and I'm going to set … she got our foot in the door and I'm going to start up to make it possible for more Greens to be elected. Well, there's more of us coming.

And my attitude towards it was, in fact, it was determined by where I chose to sit. Anne Lynch, who was the Deputy Clerk of the Senate, said to me later, she said, 'I knew you are really, really on the ball. And a really classy politician', of course I didn't like the word, but anyway, "when you told us how you chose where you sit." Because when I went there, I

[24] According to the Senate's rules, at a specified time each sitting day, the President shall propose "That the Senate do now adjourn", and this allows Senators to speak for up to 10 minutes on any matter. On Tuesdays a Senator may speak again for not more than 10 minutes if no other Senator who has not already spoken once wishes to speak, provided that they do not speak for more than 20 minutes. See https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/aso/~/link.aspx?_id=26C5D61A42754E3E93135E313B1E94D2&_z=z

discovered that Brian Harradine[25] sat in one place and Jo used to sit about two seats behind him because they were both independent Senators.

When they said, 'Where do you want to sit? The Democrats have offered you a seat next to them'. Of course they wanted the ninth Democrat senator. You know, and I said, 'Well, which is the 'yes' side of the Chamber, which is the 'no' side of the Chamber? I want to sit on the 'yes' side of the Chamber'. And on the 'yes' side of the Chamber, Brian Harradine was in the front row. And Jo had been behind him.

The Democrats were on the 'no' side. There were eight of them. And then there was, because it was Labor in power, then it was the Nationals and the Libs on the 'no' side. And the Government was on the 'yes' side. And then Brian Harradine and I … I chose the seat next to Brian Harradine because it had another crescent of the orange next to it. And I said, 'I'm sitting here so that when more Greens Senators come, they can sit next to me and behind me. So we'll fill up this little crescent of the orange. And so I sat next to Brian Harradine and Anne Lynch said, 'Well, that was a very clever decision to make'. And Brian mentioned it actually at the end of my first speech, they all each of the parties made a comment which was very unusual, apparently.

And Brian Harradine said, 'I'm so glad Christabel's come to sit next to me, because', he said 'because, you know, Jo Vallentine always sat behind me and it never occured to either of us that, you know, we should sit together'. He said, 'But I am a bit sad that I'm the only independent Senator left in the Senate. But you can see that at the end of my [shuffles papers] Where did I put it? Yes, here, [reads] he said, 'It was very unusual. He said, 'I note that Senator Chamarette stated she's not an independent but is here as a Green. I feel then rather solitary now being the only independent Senator in this place. I'm pleased that Senator Vallentine (sic) has come to sit next to me, which is very nice indeed. I would have liked former Senator Vallentine, for whom I had a great personal respect, to have sat next to me as well. But it did not occur to either of us at the time'. [stops reading]

So it was brilliant to sit next to him because he was such a … he was the old man of the house, he'd been there the longest. He was so clever and he knew procedures and things. And so if I ever wanted to find anything out, I just had to say, 'Brian, how do I do this?' And he'd tell me, it was fabulous. [shows papers] So that's my first speech.

And yes. So in that first year, I was learning, I was on a learning curve and it was very stressful because it was flying over for two weeks, coming back for two weeks, flying over for two weeks. And every time I came back, people said, 'Oh, how was your holiday?' And every time I went back to Canberra, they said, 'How was your holiday? Or your break?' And it wasn't a break. It was really flat out. And I developed late-onset asthma. I think it was the beginnings of my type 2 diabetes, I put on weight. I was very, very sick that year.

But all I did was sit and listen and learn. And I had no power until Janet Powell got dethroned from the Democrats by Cheryl Kernot. And she became an independent. And she sat next to me and she was brilliant because she acted like a Whip for me. She understood the political process. And see, when there were the two of us, we could put a motion. Before there were two of us, none of that, Jo couldn't put a motion, I couldn't put a motion.

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[25] Harradine served as an independent Tasmanian Senator from 1975 to 2005. In 1975 he was expelled from the ALP, and was the longest-serving independent Federal politician in Australian history. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Harradine

DW: Because there was no-one to second it?

[01:12:10] **CHAMARETTE:** Yes. You have to have two people to put a motion and Brian Harradine couldn't either. But when Janet Powell[26] and I got there, we could put motions together and support each other's motion. And so she was wonderful. She was, it was such a tragedy she didn't get reelected as an independent, but she was brilliant. So in that first year, it was very, very hectic, very busy, flat out busy.

And then, and then in '93, we had the State and the Federal election. And Jim Scott got elected to my seat in the South Metro that I'd run the year before, the time before. And Dee got elected to the Senate and we got balance of power. And then, from then on, I looked back and I thought that first year was a gentle introduction. It just went through the roof after that. And of course, we knew from the minute Dee was elected, which was in March, we knew what would happen in July when she started, because you don't start till July. And so we knew we had the numbers, it was what I called a beautiful set of numbers.

DW: In terms of that first year, you were new to the job, your staff were new. Did you also have to set up new procedures for reporting back to the Greens (WA) here in WA and the Reps Council and so on?

CHAMARETTE: No, not new procedures. Same because Jo used to come to the Reps Councils meetings and and I'd go whenever I could. I mean, I guess sometimes the Parliamentary committees and things, because I was on many Parliamentary committees. Jo was on the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Subcommittee. And on my first day in Parliament, I got elected, against Brian Harradine (I have to say, he was a bit annoyed), to replace Jo on the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee. And I was on two subcommittees of that. She'd been on the Defence Subcommittee.

I didn't go on the Defence Subcommittee. I went on the Human Rights Subcommittee and the Foreign Affairs Committee. So it was full on, the Joint Committee. And then I also put a motion on immigration and set up a joint inquiry into migration in '92, and I was on that committee. So I had a lot of committee work in that first year, which was probably more important than the Parliamentary work.

DW: Yes, the page on your website at the Parliament shows a lot of committee work, but also a number of conferences and delegations that you attended. Travel to …

CHAMARETTE: Paris.

DW: … Korea, Pakistan, Malaysia in '92, and then Paris for the Chemical Weapons Convention.

[01:14:55] **CHAMARETTE: Y**ep, yep. Well, that was due to my foreign affairs …well, no, it might have been the Foreign Affairs Committee work, but it was also the fact that I was Parliamentarians for Nuclear Disarmament. No, Parliamentarians for Peace, I think it was. And so I went with [WA ALP Senator] Pat Giles to the chemical weapons signing ceremony in Paris. See that year, that was the fortunate thing about not having any voting power, was that I was free to go on Parliamentary delegations. And so I went to Korea and Malaysia and Pakistan. I think.

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[26] In 1986, Powell was appointed an Australian Democrat Senator for Victoria, upon the resignation of the party's founder, Don Chipp. She became the third elected leader of the party, from 1 July 1990 to 19 August 1991, when she was deposed in a coup promoted by the party's Queensland division. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janet_Powell

DW: That's correct.

CHAMARETTE: One delegation and I was very … I was the only woman on most of these delegations. It was hilarious, actually, because all the other parliamentarians, because it's really a bit of a perk of being in the backbench. You get to be on a parliamentary delegation. And, I don't think they knew what to do with me. I was a woman and I was Green. And I think Jo had the same experience when she went on parliamentary delegations that they didn't quite know what to do with her because she was the only woman and she was so active.

And I was the same, I helped set up the agenda for the delegations. Like, I made sure I visited prisons everywhere we went. And I met with the women activists. And whenever parliamentary delegations came to see us in Canberra, the Parliamentary Secretary would call me up and I'd go. And I always asked them what was the state of human rights in their country and what was the state of women's rights and things like that. And I remember the Chair often would say, 'Oh, this is Senator Chamarette, don't worry about her, she's a Green'.

And I remember the Polish delegation and the Chinese delegation. I said, 'What's your most serious environmental problem?' This was to the Polish delegation, lots of lovely young men and women on that delegation. And they said, 'Oh, our worst environmental problem is the army. You know, the problem of what Russia has left behind in our country, which they won't tell us about'. That shocked [my colleagues], because all the old fogies like Ian Sinclair and stuff would always ask, you know, 'What's defence and what's trade?' And I'd say, 'What's your most serious environmental issue? What's your human rights' issues?'

And I remember when the Chinese delegation came, the Chairman made some kind of disparaging remark about, 'Oh, this is Senator Chamarette. Senator Chamarette, do you want to ask any questions? She's just a Green'. And the person who replied said, 'Oh, Senator Chamarette, I'm so pleased to meet you, because I was the person who set up the first Green magazine in China'. He was very, very good. He said, 'We have greens in China you know'. And all the other guys were kind of flabbergasted. So I did a lot of committee work and a lot of rushing round. It was busy.

DW: You mentioned going on the delegation to Paris for the Chemical Weapons Convention with Pat Giles, the Labor Senator from WA. How were you received by other women in the Senate? Were they strict about party political lines or …

CHAMARETTE: See, Pat hadn't been in the Senate when I was there. She'd been having a three month secondment in New York with the United Nations and so she'd come … So I met her and got to know her on that delegation. In the Senate I had a bit of a clash with some of the Liberal Party women because they were so nasty to me. I remember, one Senator saying something, and I said to her afterwards, 'That was very sexist or undermining', you know, and she's, 'Oh, ooh', well, anyway,

DW: These are comments in Parliament, in the debate?

CHAMARETTE: She made some kind of comment in the debate. It was a bit patronizing, actually. I can't remember what the comment was. But afterwards I spoke to her and I said, 'That was a bit patronizing'. I was surprised, you know. [Australian Democrat Leader]

Cheryl [Kernot] hated me because, of course, she had got rid of Janet Powell, and Janet Powell and I had been so close. Ahh … Vicki Bourne was the Whip and she was fine, in the Democrats, she was quite nice.

And in the Labor Party, I think they all felt a little teeny bit envious of me because the luxury we had as Greens was we could be more extreme than the Labor Party could. The Labor Party was moving so far to the right. They were betraying things. I remember a lovely woman named Olive who asked me to come and speak to the Labor women about my work as a psychologist. But unfortunately, she died and I never got to speak to the women's group there.

And [Liberal Senator] Amanda Vanstone and I got on okay. They used to have women's drinks and I used to get invited. Oh, I've got some pictures of that, I think.

DW: We'll get to them at the end.

[01:20:22] **CHAMARETTE:** Anyway. Yeah. So they were all right but the men were even more jealous of me really. The backbenchers felt that I had far too much power. And especially after we got balance of power. Balance of power is negligible in terms of legislation, because you only got balance of power when Labor and Liberal disagreed and they only disagreed four times between '92 and '96.

They disagreed on the Budget, on some Budget measures, and that's because the Labor Party didn't like the budget that Keating brought down in '93. So Budget and Native Title. And there was a Health Bill and an Education Bill and a Racial Vilification Bill. They were the only times we really had legislative power. But every day we had power because whenever there was a process like rising or a quorum or anything, they needed the numbers.

And so the [division] bell would bring about 20 times a day. I used to be out somewhere else doing committee meetings or whatever. And I'd ring the office or the office would ring me. And they'd say, 'It's this motion and we're in the balance of power. So you have to get back there'. If we weren't in balance of power, we could abstain and not alter the effect but if we were in balance of power on any issue, we had to have a view.

So that meant we had to be across all the portfolios. And we had a practice because we couldn't possibly be across all the portfolios. We had nowhere near the staff that the other politicians had. But we had a practice that said if we don't have a position and we're in balance of power, we'll go with the status quo. If we do have a position, we'll go with the position. But if we haven't got balance of power, we can abstain if we don't have a position.

So that's what we used to do. So it's that. Then when Dee came on board, she wanted certain portfolios. So we divvied it up between us. I did everything in '92 and then in '93, she had Defence, Economics. [pauses to think] That's it. I had Environment, Native Title. So she had the Budget, a big, big thing.

DW: Did any of your staff, who had interest in those topics, go and work for her? Or did you retain your staff when Dee came on board and she had new staff?

CHAMARETTE: I retained my staff and she had new staff. And then at one point there was a kind of falling out or something between her and her PA Ann Reeves. And Ann

Reeves came over and worked in my staff. And Alan Carter went to be her PA. So I forget when that swapover happened. It might have been later on like '94, '95, not in the early days. In the early days, we had separate staff.

DW: But in terms of her coming on board after that '93 election, and you holding the balance of power, you're dealing with probably one of the most important pieces of legislation in the 20th century in the Australian Parliament, Mabo, Native Title. The Mabo [decision] was handed down by the High Court in '92, June '92[27].

CHAMARETTE: I was sitting there in Parliament [House] when Frank Brennan[28] made the explanation of the Mabo decision. And I remember being bitterly disappointed by it because it was a very conservative decision. It was not a decision that really reflected the dispossessed Aboriginal people. So, I knew from the minute I got there that that was going to be one of the most important things that I was going to do. And I still think it was the most important thing for me to do. I was there for the Mabo decision and I commenced with my staff travelling around to every single Aboriginal community in Western Australia and also a few in Northern Territory. Because I wanted to see how what we were experiencing in Western Australia compared with the *Northern Territory Land Rights Act*, because that had made a significant difference in native title.

In fact, for Aboriginal rights, the *Northern Territory Land Rights Act* was the highest bar of rights and the *Native Title Bill* when it came in, I was expecting it to be at that level, if not better. And it was less. It undermined the native title rights [already legislated in NT]. It took away the mining veto. It took away heaps of compensation. And it was just shocking. But the problem with the *Native Title Bill* was that nobody had read it except us. Even the Government. Gareth Evans didn't read the *Native Title Bill* until the week after we started debating it in the Senate. And he did not read the details.

DW: And he was the Attorney-General!

[01:25:40] **CHAMARETTE:** He was. That is, the Leader of the Government in the Senate and the Attorney-General. And he led the debate in the Senate. So we were very, very well prepared for that *Native Title Bill* because my staff made it their duty to consult every Aboriginal community in Western Australia. We made relationships with the New South Wales Land Council, with the Northern Territory. It was a very, very big agenda item for us. In fact, it was so big that I couldn't go to Nelson Mandela's inauguration [as South African President]. Jo and Dee went because I had to be there for a Native Title Committee, or something.

DW: In terms of the knowledge of those issues within the Greens (WA) Party and its members, did you have to do work there to bring people up to speed about what this proposed legislation meant?

CHAMARETTE: Not really. They were very good. The Reps Council was very supportive because when I'd meet with them, I'd tell them what the Government was doing and why we were taking the stance we were taking. So the Reps Council was fine. The problem was our supporters and our ex-Labor Party supporters and our peace movement supporters and people that were getting their information from the Government's press

[27] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mabo_v_Queensland_(No_2)
[28] An Australian Jesuit priest, human rights lawyer and academic known for his 1998 involvement in the Wik debate when Paul Keating called him "the meddling priest". Brennan has a longstanding reputation of advocacy in the areas of law, social justice, refugee protection, Aboriginal reconciliation and human rights activism. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Brennan_(priest)

releases, which said that the Greens were being recalcitrant. Just like when we wouldn't give them a *carte blanche* with the budget.

Keating made the statement when we refused to say we'll give the Budget a blank cheque. He said, we were tantamount to blocking supply. Like [ALP PM Gough] Whitlam, you know[29]. And that outraged all the Labor Party supporters in the Greens. They didn't get it. And we said, 'No, no, no, all we're saying is we will negotiate the budget piece by piece, issue by issue'. Because the first really controversial thing I did, and we did, was we said, 'We're not doing cross issue dealing'.

And that's what I'd learned from Janet Powell. I'd learned that the Democrats had given the Government, on the budget, the power to do whatever they wanted, providing they got some perks, they got their issues. Harradine had been the same.

So the Government had been used to, for years, passing the Budget by putting a little kind of present or deal to the Democrats and Brian Harradine. So then they knew they had their Budget passed even before they'd presented the [associated] legislation. And I kept saying, 'We can't agree to pass something we haven't seen. We will negotiate it, Bill by Bill', and Dee was the same. That outraged everybody. And it was similar with Native Title, that we we had to look at the legislation before we decided. How are we going for time?

DW: No, we're going fine. I'm just thinking during that time, you would have come under a lot of pressure in terms of the abuse. I can remember you being called [by the ALP Government] 'fairies at the bottom of the garden', 'fruitcakes' and so on. How did that affect you personally?

CHAMARETTE: Oh, fine. It was a bit of a compliment, really, because, and I think I said this somewhere, I said, 'The two things that helped me most to understand Parliament was being in Fremantle Prison and getting a lot of flak. That was much worse'. And being in the Anglican Synod, because that operates on Westminster Parliamentary principles, predates Westminster Parliament. And I'd been on that Anglican Synod. So being abused and denigrated was not a problem.

And I used to quote, I think it's Schopenhauer…, I might have got it wrong, but the phrase I used to say was, 'When people say things, new things, fresh things, the first reaction to it is ridicule or denigration. And the second reaction is anger. How dare you say that? And the third reaction is acceptance as obvious'. And we got a lot of the negative flack because we were saying [new] things.

I believe that the Parliamentary system was flawed because of the way the political parties operated. I actually liked the Westminster Parliamentary system, it was very fair and representative. But the way the political parties maneuvered, it was not representative or fair. And so the Parliamentary staff, the Clerk and all the staff, loved us. They thought we were wonderful. A breath of fresh air, really, because we were very good with Parliamentary procedures. So cross-issue dealings was the first time we got a lot of flak. And with the Budget, you know, [we were accused] we don't know what we're talking about.

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[29] In 1975 the Liberal Party threatened to block the Budget of ALP PM Gough Whitlam in the Senate. This would have been the first time that the Senate had ever taken this action and the dispute later led to the Governor General Kerr sacking the Government on 11 November 1975. See https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/platparl/c04

DW: So that was a budget of '93.

[01:30:39] **CHAMARETTE:** Yep. Yes. And in fact, it changed the Budget forever after. They started to put costings and things up after that and started doing the Budget differently from that time, because it was such a problem for them. Why was I telling you that? It was because I think …

DW: About the denigration and abuse you received.

CHAMARETTE: Yeah, that's right. But, I guess it had some damage from the point of view of quite enlightened people who watched ABC and listened to Radio National and everything would have believed what the Labor Party was saying about us, that we were 'gumnut twins' and we didn't know what we were talking about, etc. And that might have done damage to the Greens as well. They didn't like being treated like that.

DW: Because at the same time, especially with the *Mabo Bill*, the State Government in WA had its own legislation under [Liberal Premier] Richard Court to try and undermine aspects of the Federal legislation. Were you involved in any of those processes at all?

CHAMARETTE: I certainly was. I rang Richard Court and asked him to rescind his Bill. He said, 'I can't do that, Christabel' [laughs]. No, no. But I was involved in all of that. And I was very much involved in the West Australian Aboriginal people's positions, like the people up at the Miriuwung Gajerrong up on the border near Kununurra, and the Swan Brewery people, the Noongars, and they all wanted me to vote the Bill down because it was such a bad Bill.

They knew what was in it for them was dispossession. But the Labor Party people thought that Keating was the only one who was going to do anything and therefore it had to be supported. It was the best we were going to get. Well, it wasn't good enough and it was shocking, in fact. It was a repeat of *terra nullius*. I've got an article on that you might be interested to read.

DW: I'll get that, yeah. But what major changes can you remember achieving for that Bill after you negotiated?

[01:32:55] **CHAMARETTE:** Well, heaps of changes. What we did was we had some … you need to know we had lots of volunteers working for us in a good way. We had three constitutional lawyers and the Northern New South Wales Land Council helped pay for a constitutional lawyer to give us assistance. And the Greens and the Democrats went through the legislation clause by clause and made a list of amendments that the Aboriginal people wanted us to have to the Bill.

And then we made an agreement that the Democrats would put all the enlightened sounding amendments that were likely to get through. And the Greens would support them, of course, and the Greens would do all the extreme-end ones and the Democrats would support them. So we had a strategy. We had about 150 amendments, and it was the longest debate up to that time in the House. And some of the things that we did was, the most significant one was that we objected to the reversal of the burden of proof, which was the wrong way. Aboriginal people had to prove that they had the right [against the Government] and that was wrong. [The Government should have to prove that native title

was extinguished not that Aboriginal people need to prove that it still existed.] So we were opposed to that.

We didn't manage to get that changed, but we sort of got it, we got a little bit of a concession towards it. We wanted coexistence of pastoral lease and they [the Government] were going to extinguish it. And there were four points. I've got them in press releases. And we were able to make significant changes, which only lasted, basically, six years or even, yeah, '93 to '98, because [Liberal PM] Howard, when he got in, Howard had what he called the ten-point plan and his ten-point plan was basically a reversal of all the Green amendments.

This also meant that there was a little window of opportunity between what we did to the [Native Title] Bill and what was taken away, which was a window of opportunity which allowed the Wik decision to succeed, the Waanyi, the Miriuwung Gajerrong, another one in South Australia. All of those native title wins were because of the amendments the Greens put into the Bill. And Robert French, who was the first head of the [National Native Title] Tribunal, he called the Bill ... What happened was we debated it in the Senate and got these changes put in. But what we didn't realize is they had already prepared the regs [regulations] before the changes in the Senate and they had got the assent to the regs, not to the legislation.

So it was what Robert French called the Green Fault Line in the legislation. But it was actually the Senate amendments that actually significantly improved the [Bill, it wasn't enough. See, I was teetering. I had these four positions that I didn't want the *Racial Discrimination Act* rolled back. I didn't want the [mining] veto removed. I wanted just terms compensation. And I wanted pastoral lease coexistence. The pastoral lease coexistence was the last thing. If I hadn't got that, I would have voted the Bill down.

And I was going to vote it down. We had a meeting with Gareth [Evans, Attorney-General] and [ALP PM Paul] Keating and, who else was with us? Noel Pearson. And as I said, I can't watch … because Gareth was saying, 'What is it? What's your bottom line?' And I said, 'It's coexistence, that you can't extinguish native title'. And he said, 'Well, I think you should take your bottom line and stick it up your bum'. So I said, 'Okay'. I stood up. I said, 'How do you want me to vote the Bill down? Before we debate it in the Senate or after?' And he said, 'Sit down. I expect you to debate it through'. So that was one of the little contratemps we had.

But then Noel Pearson traipsed up to where I was and asked me what the problem was about coexistence, because they had actually agreed [to it being extinguished]. [He was part of what] was called the 'A team', it was the Aboriginal advisers they had: Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton, Lowitja O'Donoghue, David Ross, [and others from KLC and ATSIC who were with the Labor Party and the Government] and those people. And then there was the 'B team', which was the Greens and the Democrats and the New South Wales Land Council. And then there was the 'X team', which was Michael Mansell and Paul from New South Wales Redfern speech area. Our WA people, [the Swan Brewery protestors], the Miriuwung Gajerrong were also the Xs. They wanted us to vote it down because it was so bad. And so we were the 'B team'. Why was I telling you about that?

DW: In terms of …

[01:38:12] **CHAMARETTE:** Oh, that's right. So Noel Pearson came up and he said to me, 'What's the problem, Christabel? You know about pastoral [leases], we're only going to

extinguish about 11 pastoral leases'. And I said, 'Which 11?' And I said, 'It's all very well for you. But the pastoral leases make up two thirds of Western Australia and they're only owned by about 11 entities, you know, and if you extinguish native title on those leases, it means that Aboriginal people are basically being re-dispossessed because all those pastoral leases went right through the roads and … they'd already, in Christmas Creek cut off the Aboriginal people and shot at them when they started to come on the land'.

Horrible things had happened. So, so I said this was the crux of it. I said, 'Richard Court's Bill[30] is better than your Bill, than this Bill, because what he did was he said, we will extinguish native title and reassert it in a new form, which meant that it didn't mean that the pastoral leases converted to freehold'. But you see, they'd made a deal to convert the pastoral leases to freehold, the [ALP Federal] Government had. So we were alienating all sorts of deals that had been made with the fisheries [departments and many other stakeholders]...

And even, oh, that was another one. One of our amendments refused to accept that the boundaries of Australia were at the low-tide (sic) mark. And we insisted, and our amendment succeeded, that the boundaries of Australia were the high-tide (sic) mark. Sorry. Low-tide, no high-tide. They wanted it at the high-tide mark. We wanted it at the low-tide mark because up North, the intertidal zone was sometimes three kilometres long. And it had native title rights on it [which would have been extinguished by this part of the Bill].

So by changing the way they defined the boundaries only for that purpose, not for any other, not for the maritime purposes, changing it like that was simply to remove native title rights on the intertidal zone. So that was the big debate between me and [ALP Attorney-General] Gareth [Evans], and we won. We've got that amendment, too.

Why was I telling you that? There was another reason for that. Oh, that's right. So I'm sitting down there saying to Noel Pearson that Richard Court's Bill is better because it doesn't dispossess people. It does extinguish native title, but it replaces it with existing title, whereas what yours does is extinguishes [on pastoral leases] more than it should. And that's not the way the outcome of Mabo should be. And he got it. And he went to see Ron Castan[31], who was a constitutional lawyer on their side in the 'A team', not one of our constitutional lawyers.

And he came back with this amendment that, I'll never forget it, actually, I think was 11c. And basically, it took the model of Richard Court's Bill and said, not withstanding the extinguishment of native title on pastoral leases, the existing practice of the Aboriginal people shall stand. Which basically meant coexistence, which basically was a big problem for all the people that wanted to extinguish native title and not have coexistence for pastoral leases. So coexistence for pastoral leases was one of my four big points.

Anyway Ron Castan designed it and they agreed to vote on it, and we got it through. That's the only reason I voted for the Bill, because it marginally improved the situation, which wasn't very good. And so it gave me great sorrow to pass it. But I knew that if we didn't pass it, it would be worse and that Labor and Liberal would get together and do the thing that Labor had come up with in the first place.

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[30] See https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/Court/1994/02/Commonwealth-Native-Title-Act-to-be-challenged-in-High-Court.aspx

[31] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ron_Castan

There was an interesting meeting in Redfern. The anniversary of the Redfern speech that Keating[32] had given was just before the native title debate. There were only two non-Aboriginal people at that meeting, Gough Whitlam and me. And we were speaking to the people in Redfern and they wanted me to vote the Bill down. And then I had to explain to them we were only in balance of power. We could vote it down, but we couldn't put anything better up instead, and they got that. And Gough got that, too. He understood where I was coming from.

DW: In terms of legislation, there was another, it seems, a big debate about your role with the sale of Telstra. And ...

[01:42:45] **CHAMARETTE:** It was very minor. It wasn't a big thing. The thing was, it was really interesting because, when we introduced cross-issue dealing, people thought it was a nonsense, you know, because it was such a tradition, it's called 'log rolling' in America where you support one issue in exchange for something on the other.

But right the way through Dee and I always negotiated within issues, not across issues. We didn't agree to a deal because we were getting the Chair of a committee like the Democrats did, or we didn't agree to this because we were getting funding for an electorate in Tasmania like Brian Harradine did. We just said if you improve the bill we'll vote for it. If you don't, we won't. I've got a section of my PhD thesis on that logrolling because it was… people didn't understand it well.

But the irony was that when I was, I think I was still finishing the term, but I hadn't been reelected, was when Howard was elected. And he came up with this ludicrous notion that, and it came from an idiocy of thinking like Telstra telegraph poles. He did this exchange of the Telstra deal and everybody got it that that was totally corrupt to cross-issue deal in that way. So that created a little bit of furore. And it meant that the media had finally got what we were talking about. But it wasn't a major issue.

The other major, major issue, and the reason it was a failure, but it was a major issue, was immigration. Dee and I and Brian Harradine and the Democrats voted against every single amendment by the Government and the Opposition to migration legislation. But we never had balance of power. We failed every time, but we voted against every issue for mandatory detention. And one of my achievements was I set up this Committee on asylum, border control and detention, but I wasn't the Chair of it. I moved it in the Senate in '92 and I was on the Committee. This report was produced in '94, February '94.

So we sat all the way through '92, '93. I couldn't agree with the outcome and I did a dissenting report, and that dissenting report is still true[33]. It opposed all the changes that are still there in place. It was the first time that the whole issue of psychological illness and well-being impeded by the mandatory detention [was raised]. It introduced the unfairness to children, all those issues, and it's all still relevant and still hasn't happened. So that was the other major [issue].

And I was on the … that was the Joint Committee on Migration, went right through. So I was on that Committee and even after this report came out. But I had a dissenting report. And I remember the Chair of it, Barney, somebody who's Labor Party [Senator Bernard

[32] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redfern_Park_Speech
[33] *Asylum, Border Control and Detention*, Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Tabled: 3/03/1994. Dissenting report on page 201. See https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=reports/1994/1994_pp44.pdf

Cooney], when I went back in '96 (sic 2002) when Howard was in, he wasn't the Chair anymore because he was in Opposition[34]. And he said to me, 'Christabel. Oh, no'. That's right. He met me ten years later when I was back in the Senate visiting. He said to me, 'Christabel, your minority report is still relevant'. And it's still here, sadly, which I'm not proud of. But that's there [gesturing to it], that we did. We did do that. We were part of a book as well on the wrongful detention of asylum seekers. I did a chapter in there.

DW: Mmm. You were preselected again for the '96 election for the Senate with Robin Chapple, I think as number two. How did you feel not being reelected? How did that affect you?

[01:46:45] **CHAMARETTE:** Oh, I was terribly disappointed, terribly sad because I felt like it was my obligation to Jo really, to get reelected so that we could continue the tradition. But the problem was that, when Jo was elected, it was always to a Labor Government. And when a Labor Government was elected, the preferences tended to favour the Greens in the Senate. And when a Liberal Government was elected, it tended to favour the [Australian] Democrats. And that's why the Democrats disappeared really in … [WA Democrat Senator] Jean Jenkins was displaced by Jo Vallentine in 1990 because Labor got in and the preferences got Jo elected.

And so then when it came to '96, I didn't get in because the Democrats got the preference flow from [Liberal PM] Howard's lot and [Australian Democrat] Andrew Murray was elected [in WA]. So I felt very sad. I felt very sad before that because there was a lot of inner division in the Greens and they weren't very supportive of me as a Senate candidate.

DW: In WA?

CHAMARETTE: Yes, just in WA. Well, I don't know anywhere else. But yes, I don't think they understood, actually, what we were doing or how much we were doing. And there was a lot of ordinary people who'd been reading papers that denigrated us and didn't [understand why] ... A lot of the work that I did was Parliamentary and I believe it was furthering a whole lot of things like participatory democracy and community consultation, everything. But when it was on issues, it was easier for people to say, what are they doing? And not realize what we were doing.

DW: It must have also been a bit frustrating because the election was earlier in the year, but your term finished in the middle of the year, have to serve out that term knowing that you wouldn't then resit in the new Parliament?

CHAMARETTE: No, that was all right. There was was some ... It was sad because we no longer had balance of power, and Dee was on her own, but Bob [Brown] was due to come in.

DW: Yes, that was the ironic thing, that he gets elected and you get unelected.

CHAMARETTE: He got elected. So he came and joined her when I dropped out. So there was still two Greens in the Senate, when I dropped out.

DW: Did you have a break then after your Senate term concluded?

CHAMARETTE: I certainly did, I went straight to Paris.

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[34] ALP Senator for Victoria Bernard (Barney) Cooney. See https://biography.senate.gov.au/cooney-bernard-cornelius/

DW: Right.

CHAMARETTE: The day after we … the Parliament rose on June the 30th [1996].

DW: For a holiday or a conference?

[01:49:47] **CHAMARETTE:** A holiday, totally holiday. And I took six months off and I decided I would live on the dole - not on the dole, I wasn't on the dole, but I'd pay myself the dole and see whether I could survive on the dole for six months and not even think about working. So that I could try and get over this. Six months was too short. And I remember being worried about what work I would do, etc..

And [partner] Chris Williams said to me, 'Well, you said you were going to take six months and not worry about what you're going to do. Why don't you not worry about it 'til the end of the six months and then start looking for a job?' And the week before the six months ended, I got offered a job as the Director of a counselling service [SafeCare][35], which I had helped set up in '89. So I went straight back into my clinical psychology work and the work that I've been doing with offenders, the treatment of child sexual abuse and working with families where child sex abuse that occurred. I helped set that up in '89. It ran for 20 years and I was the Director of it for the last 12. So I went straight back into that.

DW: Did you remain active within the Greens?

CHAMARETTE: I did, sort of, I did. I think I mentioned to you over the phone I was an associate member when we were founded because of my resistance to party politics. Then when I was in the Senate for the four years, I became a full member because I felt if I was representing them, I needed to be. And then when I came out of the Senate, I went back to being an associate member. But I was part … I went to Reps Council. I used to run a polling booth. I ran a polling booth for about 20 years and handed out [how to votes] for the Greens.

But the point at which we joined the Australian Greens, which was 12 years after we started, I believe that's where the Greens (WA) ceased and it became a sub-branch of the Australian Greens. So the Greens (WA), which is like the Greens New South Wales or Greens Tasmania, took over then [as part of the Australian Greens]. And we joined under that flawed Constitution, from my point of view, which wasn't a federation [of community-based parties], but was a major party with State branches. And most people [unlike me], didn't have any objections to that. You know, in the Greens, obviously. And so I felt that was an appropriate time to withdraw from full membership or associate membership. But I still support them when they're doing things. I think, you know, some of the work's been great.

DW: So each of the three ballots to join the Australian Greens you opposed?

CHAMARETTE: Absolutely. Because of the Constitution. If they'd agreed to a federation, I wouldn't have had any problem. But I felt it was not Green to have that kind of major main party structure [like the other political parties]. And I actually think it's going to lead to the demise of the Greens, by becoming another mainstream political party rather than what I felt the Greens (WA) was offering … [which] was a different model of political involvement at community level, that would actually challenge the political process much more, just like

[35] See https://safecare.org.au/about/

WE did. We challenged the political process and they didn't like what we were doing and we weren't operating on the lines of mainstream political parties.

DW: Do you still take an interest in what the Greens (WA) are doing, what their policies are and so on?

CHAMARETTE: Yes, a bit. I mean, I think Rachel's [Siewert] wonderful and I think Jordon's [Steele-John] doing a great job. And, I, you know, …. I went over there, I think, and, oh, I know, I went over for when the [nine] Senators were in. I thought that was lovely.

DW: To Canberra?

CHAMARETTE: Adam Bandt[36]. Yeah, Jo and Dee and I went across [in 2010] for the inauguration of the … for the swearing in of the ten [MPs]… for Adam Bandt and the nine in the Senate. And that was exciting. And I'm very supportive of Adam Bandt. He's from W.A. and he was part of Green Left. And I think of all the parties in the Parliament, I prefer the Greens.

DW: Would that be the biggest difference you've seen in terms of the development of Greens (WA) as a political party since 1990, is it's become more like other major political parties?

[01:54:32] **CHAMARETTE:** Yes, absolutely. And I think it's prided itself on it, and it sort of thinks it's coming of age. But I don't. I think it's sad, it's a demise. See, [shows a pamphlet] that was the opening of the … it's saying celebrating 21 years in Parliament from 1990 to 2011. And it's sort of starting with Jo and me and Dee and things. But, the Australian Greens has kind of gone back and co-opted the Greens (WA) into its history with Jo and myself and Dee … which is okay because the Greens (WA) agreed to become the Australian Greens and to cease to be the Greens (WA). So there's nothing particularly wrong about that. But for somebody like me who knows, who had an aspiration about something a bit different, that's a bit of a sadness.

DW: You haven't joined any other political party?

CHAMARETTE: Oh no, I never would. Oh no, no, no, no, no, no danger of that. I couldn't possibly because I so don't believe in party politics. I do believe in parliamentary democracy, but not party politics. I feel as if party politics has wrecked parliamentary politics. And, you know, now it's really deja vu-ish when the Greens got balance of power again, but with all these independents that are kind of left field and everything. It was a bit of *deja vu*, like making me remember back to '93 to '96. And there's a lot of … when there's balance of power, there's a lot of opportunity for community input. But it's not always the kind of input that I would agree with.

DW: I noticed today you're wearing all purple. How much has the feminist view of the world influenced your role or membership in the Greens and your attitudes towards …

CHAMARETTE: Oh a great deal. I felt like the women's movement back in the days, with Petra Kelly and the German Greens was, the Greens who are a coming together of environment, women's movement, peace, social justice movements. And I very much felt that I was part of that. And I remember when I was a Greens Senator feeling some kind of

[36] Bandt become the first member of the Greens elected to the House of Representatives at a Federal election, and the second overall after Michael Organ, who was elected at a by-election. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Bandt

pressure to wear green, it's not a favorite colour of mine. And I compromised by wearing suffragette colours- green, white and purple. And I gradually grew to … my eye loves purple. You can see.

DW: So I also noticed, I think it was in 1991, before you entered Parliament, the Greens got their first convener, a female convener, Patti Christensen.

CHAMARETTE: Yeah.

DW: What was your feeling?

CHAMARETTE: We were very feminine. Oh, no, we were great. It was … even our men were feminists, it was lovely.

DW: Are you allowed to say that? I'm not sure you're allowed to say that. [chuckles]

CHAMARETTE: Well, they were then. Chris Williams is very strong, I mean, the feminists mightn't agree with it, but he was one of the most strongly feminist people in the Alternative Coalition. And, even the old ex-Communist Party people and everything, they were very strongly pro women and feminism. And I think it comes from the German Greens influence, really, that the activist movements and the suffragette movement. In my first speech, I talked about the suffragette movement and how Jo Vallentine was in that mould. And I didn't say anything about me, but Christobel Pankhurst, Emmeline Pankhurst's daughter was key in the suffragette movement in England.

DW: And got put in prison for it, etc. After you finished your term in parliament in '96, did you keep in touch with Dee at all? And what's your relationship?

CHAMARETTE: No, not really. Well, you know, she and I had a very uneasy kind of interaction.

DW: Right.

CHAMARETTE: In that sense, that she was quite hard to work with. And I don't know if Bob Brown would say the same, but I think he might. Because she's very determined and sees things from her own point of view. And she had a particular commitment to a particular economic stance and furthering her own agenda. And one of the, I don't know whether I should say this, but one of the things, I had a strategy of working with her …

DW: We just had a short interruption.

[01:59:19] **CHAMARETTE:** I had a strategy when I was working with Dee … I found she came from, and I've got a few friends like this, who come from what I call the Marxist dialectic. If you suggest something, they immediately say, 'No. So I found with Dee, if I ever suggested anything, she'd say, 'No. So I developed a different technique, which was to say, 'What would you like to do?'

And she often wouldn't know or we'd make some suggestions, and then she'd choose something, which I might have suggested. And I'd say, oh, yeah, let's do that'. And we would do it. So that's how we worked together. But she was [pause] I think, I'm not sure, because I don't know what was going on, but I think her office may have received the kind of disgruntlement of people about what I was doing.

It might have actually led to a kind of difference within the Greens, which I wasn't aware of until the outfall, really. But because I was a Christian, I was spiritual, I think we got called the Christian Mafia. There was an antagonism to Chris Williams and his role in challenging Bob Brown to taking the name Green. And he prevented Bob Brown being able to exclude us from calling ourselves Green. He took it to the High Court on his own bat, not on behalf of us. And a lot of people in the Greens, including myself, wished he hadn't. But we didn't understand fully what he was doing.

And the people that do understand what he was doing, which is very few, I think, would see that there was a legitimacy to what he was doing. But Bob Brown would never have seen that. But I think, I think the Greens may have felt that I was not able to be controlled.

DW: Right.

CHAMARETTE: And I think they might have seen Dee as more part of where they were coming from. That's possible, I'm only guessing at this point. And in retrospect, looking back, I think [pause] … Yeah, what we were doing from our point of view was very exciting and cutting through a lot of stuff, but I don't think we took the grassroots [membership] with us. I don't think they fully understood ... Patti Christiansen did, she was wonderful. And I think the Reps Council did because they listened to us. But I think the broader Greens followers and maybe even the peace movement, because I remember Trish Cowcher saying to me, 'Chris…', because she was wonderful to me when I stood for Council. Unfortunately [or actually] fortunately, I didn't get in.

DW: The [City of] Fremantle Council?

CHAMARETTE: Yes, this was in '89. I won on primary votes and lost on preferences because the Labor Party had fielded two candidates, a woman and a man to counteract me getting in and oh, thank God I didn't get in. But Trish was fabulous and she helped me with that campaign. And I remember meeting her at some point after, either the Budget or native title where we were getting this flack that the Greens were opposed to Aboriginal issues, which is nonsense. People didn't realize because the Government was saying, 'The Greens are going to stuff the Native Title Bill. They're gonna go with the Liberals'. And obviously the Liberals were anti-native title.

And Trish said to me, 'You know, Christabel, I would never have supported you getting in if I thought you'd do this'. So I think she might, she had the honesty to say to me, but it may have been that other people felt that, too, that how could the Greens not support native title. And I remember [Sir] Ronald Wilson[37] coming to visit and lobby because the Government realized that we were listening to the Aboriginal community.

So they flew groups of Aboriginal people over from all around Australia to urge us to support the Bill. And they would also … they'd fly people from Western Australia over. They would say, 'Please support the Bill. You know, Keating says it's good'. And I'd always say to them, 'Have you read the Bill? Do you know what's in the Bill?' When I told them what was in the Bill, they could understand, you know, and Ronald Wilson was one of those.

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[37] A distinguished lawyer, judge and social activist who served on the High Court between 1979-89 and as the President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission between 1990 and 1997. Probably best known as the co-author with Mick Dodson of the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report into the Stolen Generation. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronald_Wilson

And he said, ‘You have to support the Bill’. And I said, ‘We can't support it. Have you read it?’ And he said, ‘No. He hadn’t read it’. None of them had read it. They were all doing it according to the debate in the press. And nobody had any idea what we were contending with except the constitutional lawyers that were drafting the amendments and the Land Councils that were asking us. We were acting on their behalf. We weren’t putting amendments that WE thought were good. We were putting amendments on behalf of Aboriginal people to avoid the reduction of their human rights.

So it was not well understood. And we didn’t have heaps of people in … we didn’t have advocates in the media in the main, and and so it was really difficult to get the message across of what we were doing. It would be much easier in this day of social media to be able to do that.

DW: To get your message across?

[02:04:57] **CHAMARETTE:** Oh, there’s something I wanted to tell you about that we did. You know, I said native title was the most important reason to be there. Immigration was but in a sad way, it was a failure because we didn’t succeed. But one of the things we did was we actually were very, very crucial in translating the political system and the process into the new age because we changed the hours of Parliament sitting. We started them working on Mondays and we stopped this gentlemen’s agreement that you go on a Tuesday afternoon ‘til eleven o'clock and blah, blah, blah.

And we [curtailed the] longer sittings … put time limits on the speeches and the adjournment speeches and things. We changed Question Time and the time limits on Question Time and the representation of questions. Like we insisted that in the Senate the representation of questions should reflect the representation in Parliament. So it meant we got questions more often so did the Democrats … we cut down Dorothy Dixers[38] with the support of the Government. They were happy to cut out Dorothy Dixers as well.

And the first bill that was transmitted digitally, was at our request, and it was the Native Title Bill that we asked that we have a digital copy. And up to that point, they had had no digital copies of any legislation. So we asked for that and we got it. We got the first digital copy and we put a motion… we were putting a motion in the Senate that said that we think all the native title legislation should be given in digital form to all the members of Parliament. And there was a furore.

Anyway they to-ed and fro-ed and they agreed with us and said, ‘Can you postpone it ‘til next Tuesday? And change the wording so that it applies not just to native title legislation, but to all legislation’. So we said, ‘Sure’. So we presented the motion in Parliament that actually [took us into the electronic age] … because computers were barely recognized at that time. So this was in ‘93. We swapped over at the end of ‘93 because the [Native Title] Bill went through on December 21st. So towards the end, we became digital. And we brought them into the 21st century.

DW: In terms of ‘we’, you’re talking about yourself and Dee proposing motions or was it you and the Democrats or …

CHAMARETTE: No, it was me and Dee putting motions in the Parliament.

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DW: And the same with sitting hours?

CHAMARETTE: It was my office. Yeah. And also we got Whips, we got representation and the Whips and things like that that they didn't want to give me in '92. In '93, I said, [now we have balance of power] I think you'd better.

DW: In terms of the future of the Greens, you were speaking a little bit before about you are a bit worried that they're becoming like a mainstream political party and their future might not be as bright. Would that be a good summary of what you feel, even though at the moment the Greens have four members in the Upper House here in WA, they've got two Senators, it's quite ...

CHAMARETTE: We've always been, yeah, we've always been strong in WA. Really, and that's fine. No, no, I think at a local level, they'll be fine. It's more the Parliamentary party in the Senate that I worry about. But maybe not, I mean … but you see, how long did the Democrats last? And then they crunched. And, I'm worried that the Greens don't get recognition for what they're really doing.

Like, I think the work that Rachel [Siewert] does is enormous. She's probably a little bit like I was. She's not necessarily visible to the [wider community]. But she is held in such high regard in the Parliament and justifiably where people probably don't know what she's doing. But certainly, on Aboriginal issues and a whole lot of issues, I know she's doing a great job, just like we were but it wasn't well recognized. I think the same is there. So it doesn't … electorally they're subject to the same ebb and flow.

DW: And rely on preference flows.

[02:09:31] **CHAMARETTE:** Yeah. Now it's possible if we have a change over to Labor Party [in the Federal Parliament], that they'll do well. So I'm not saying I see them, you know, their demise. I just, I just think they [pause] … there's the same level of misunderstanding of what the Greens stand for as there was when we started. And in my first speech[39] I talk about … people think the Greens are a single issue environmental party, and they're not. They've got the four pillars and they're working on other issues and all issues, really from a green point of view. But that's not well recognized.

And I think the kind of debacle about climate change which has allowed them to be vilified, not necessarily rightly, in the same way as we were vilified [over native title], is sort of a kind of the same weakness point. The Government and Opposition are able to ridicule them in the same way they could ridicule Dee and I. But in a more damaging way, because you ridicule the party. We didn't even have a [Parliamentary] party. We were just two people. We didn't even have a party at that stage because you needed five members [in Parliament] to have a party. And that's how you got staff as well. We didn't have any staff, extra staff as a party, we just had … we were [simply] two single Senators[40].

DW: You've talked earlier about the emergence of the Greens in Fremantle and how it's been an important base [for the party]. And certainly, you know, Adele Carles won the [State] seat here in 2008. Do you think there's a chance that the Greens can win another

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[39] See https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;orderBy=date-eLast;page=0;query=Dataset%3Ahansardr,hansards,hansardr80,hansards80%20((SpeakerId%3ASN5))%20Date%3A01%2F01%2F1992%20%3E%3E%2001%2F01%2F1997;rec=2;resCount=Default

[40] Bob Brown was elected as an Australian Green Senator for Tasmania at the 1996 Federal election. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Brown

Lower House seat in Fremantle? Or will it always have a representation in the Upper Houses of our two Parliaments.

CHAMARETTE: That was so sad and so disappointing because really, I think if anybody could have elected a Lower House Green, it was Fremantle, and they did. And they would have kept doing it and they could still. And I'm sure Brad Pettitt[41] will get in with South Metro because we're very green here. And I think … I felt as though, and this could be very egocentric of me, but the Alternative Coalition had a strong presence in Fremantle. That was our support base. I think we got … when I ran against Jim McGinty [in the 1990 by-election][42], I think I got somewhere between 17-20% of the vote, and my preferences elected Jim McGinty versus the Liberal candidate Arthur Marshall. He would have gone in if I hadn't directed my preferences to Jim McGinty.

So we had a very strong base and Adele got in on that. And then she betrayed it because of her naivety and inexperience, and whatever. And people would say, 'Well, we'll never do that again'. And I think they mightn't And I think you'd be hard pressed to find a Green running in the Lower House in Fremantle. If they had the credibility, like if Brad was running in the Lower House. [considering] I mean, he's been the Mayor for ten years. I think he'll get in in South Metro, but I don't think he would get in if he was Lower House, even though he's got a lot of support. So I just don't know. Anyway, that's my view. If anybody could support a Green Lower House [seat] for a politician in the Assembly, it would be Fremantle.

DW: We've covered a lot of ground. All your achievements. And I really enjoyed to listen to your discussion about Mabo, given its importance. Is there anything we've missed that you'd like to add before we conclude?

CHAMARETTE: I had a list somewhere of things I was going to cover [rifles through papers]. Oh, you know how you said you wanted to know, well see all my stuff. Well, the problem with that is there's so much of it. And as I said, there's a sea container in the National Archives. Murdoch University has a bit of a little collection. I've got boxes and boxes.

DW: We might come back and ...

CHAMARETTE: Yeah, you can have a look at that.

DW: Is that your list over there, on the …?

CHAMARETTE: It's here, I think, here we are. I'm still using old paper from Dee Margetts' and my office.

DW: Recycling.

CHAMARETTE: Recycling it all. But somewhere I've got a little list. Oh, where is it? Where can it be? [shuffling through papers].

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[41] In 2020, Mayor of Fremantle and preselected as the Greens (WA) candidate for the Upper House seat of South Metropolitan for the 2021 State election.

[42] The by-election was held on 26 May 1990 for the Legislative Assembly seat of Fremantle and was triggered by the resignation of ALP member, and former-Deputy Premier, David Parker in April 1990. It attracted 11 candidates and there was a 9% swing against the ALP. Christabel received 12.4% of the formal vote. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1990_Fremantle_state_by-election

DW: What's on that notebook just there?

CHAMARETTE: No, that's something different I think.

DW: Your shopping list?

[02:15:00] **CHAMARETTE:** That's my list of things to do each day. I wrote it somewhere. But, I don't know where I put it now. And I think it's all right. I think we've covered a lot, probably too much. See, I've got 14 boxes of Senate memorabilia. More than that, really, and then my [draft] PhD is another five boxes. Because I did my PhD on the psychopathology, ah that's where it is, the psychopathology of political life. And it was just about the four years in the Senate.

DW: We could always come back.

CHAMARETTE: Yes. That's fine. Can you see a bag?

DW: So, Christabel, I just want to thank you once again for this time going through your interesting life in the Greens before, in fact, there was a Greens (WA). Thanks very much.

CHAMARETTE: That's all right. Good. I now remember where the list is. It's on the back of that Senate biography that I gave you initially. There we are. That's it. Yes.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Link to Christabel Chamarette's Federal Parliament Biography page- https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id:%22handbook/allmps/SN5%22;querytype=;rec=0