

## Chapter 4: A Nonsense Situation

**Eve**

Yep, I'm recording. So, hello!

**Ninette**

Hiya! [giggles]

**Eve**

Hi! So, some of the other interviews have started with a bit of an introduction to who you are and where we are. And also if you wanna ask me stuff you can ask me things as well, so it's like a conversation rather than like a TV interview where the interviewer, you don't know who they are and they're cut out of stuff.

**Ninette**

Yeah OK, I'll try and keep it brief. As you know, once I get started can just keep on going. But yeah, so essentially, right now we're sitting in my albeit flat, it's like a studio space, which I've been here for coming up to next month, November, I would have been here for three years. I like it. I like the fact that it's helping me get on route to being fully independent, which I'm super big on.

And we're in Hackney. The place I was born. I love Hackney! It's just got a creative pull that's just got me for life. So here we are, sitting in Hackney, literally about to talk about one of my favourite things, mental health. Let's do it!

**Eve**

And who are you as well?

**Ninette**

Oh yeah, I didn't actually say my name in any of that did I? It's Ninette, my name's Ninette, which, I love that name in itself. My dad, it's almost like as soon as I came out of the womb, my dad knew that I was going to be a little bit odd [laughs]. So basically Ninette means *favoured*, in Hebrew, French and Christian it means *favoured*, so it's an awesome name! Love it.

**Eve**

Wow that's awesome.

**Ninette**

Daddy you did all right! [laughs]

**Eve**

Do you wanna tell us a little bit about who you are, where you're at?

**Ninette**

Yeah, interesting times right now. So, a key thing for me that I do is I work two days a week with the NHS and I really love my job. It's been a long time coming that I can actually sit comfortably and say, "Hey I actually enjoy work". I enjoy getting up and going to work because it's within mental health and it's peer support work and that's something that I feel really passionate about.

I just feel there's a lot of value that comes from sharing in the experience of mental health distress, which at some point if you haven't already likely to experience in your lifetime. Which no one really wants to go through, but I found that in the most difficult and dark times I've been able to align with my true self. It's like I'm coming into being.

So essentially going back to where I work, I work on a ward and also with an Early Intervention Service. And then when I'm not working two days a week I model and I take pictures. It's a nice little array of different things going on.

**Eve**

It's a really interesting combination of things, and I can see just looking around your space you've got these amazing photography lights - you've got your ring light, you've got multiple tripods going on, you've got amazing clothes!

**Ninette**

I know; it's ridiculous!

**Eve**

Your shoes are awesome!

**Ninette**

The wardrobe will not close, as you can see. It's just given up. It's on its last legs. I don't know how I'm doing this [Eve laughs] but yeah, literally this is me all wrapped up. There's a bit of everything going on. [laughs]

**Eve**

Is there a favourite thing that kind of captures your spirit of creativity and your passions?

**Ninette**

Ooh that is such a good question. I think it would be the light ring, for what it represents. Not just the fact that it's awesome in helping me take super sick selfies, but it reminds me of what I do as a photographer. What I do as a model. And the fact that, I just need to be surrounded by things that I love

and photography, modelling, a variety in terms of clothes, shoes, yeah I need that because I like different things.

**Eve**

Yeah, so where do we need to begin on this journey, with the time we've got? [sirens blare outside] I wonder what feels like the most important thing to start with for you.

**Ninette**

We can start with the beginning to be honest with you.

**Eve**

What's the beginning? [sirens continue]

**Ninette**

The beginning for me, I mean I feel like saying birth now, but we're not going to go back to 1986, we don't have the time or the hours to do that!

I'm thinking more like the beginning of, I guess, my mental health journey, if we were to call it something like that. So it would be when I was sectioned, which it was unusual circumstances.

So basically that happened in 2016. It was a very difficult time. I was transitioning in terms of needing to free myself from my home environment with my mother, because I just find that to be really toxic for my type of character. I like open-minded people. I like people that are trying to grow and be the best that they can be. And I find that with anything or anyone that's stationary and doesn't want to grow I find that quite stifling.

So in short, what happened in 2016 is I'd made arrangements to move into a new flat, and essentially because things were quite rocky between myself and my mother, I thought initially at the time that it would be best to call the police for assistance in getting my belongings from my mum's address.

Which, if we want to talk about insight, because that word is popping up to me again because we discussed that, if I had the insight that I have now, then I wouldn't have called the police. And that has further shaped my narrative in terms of how I see the police. I think they, overall, they could do a better job.

So the police officer that arrived, basically arrived in the thick of my dispute with my mother. And essentially what my mum said that triggered the situation was that she hadn't seen me all day, but somehow even though she'd not seen me for the whole day she told the police officer that I'd been smoking weed, which is a contradiction in itself. Surprisingly, wasn't questioned. And the police officer's response to that, I believe, was that in

some way he deemed me, for being upset for my mum spewing something that wasn't true, was deemed unstable mentally. How he came to that conclusion, I don't know.

But essentially, what he did was he twisted both of my arms up, up my back, really uncomfortably, and then put the cuffs on, and that started the process of the sectioning, which, completely unjust, but at the same time if anything that this experience has taught me is the fact that I'm a super resilient person.

It's a reminder that even in the darkest of situations, there's always light. And the light for me [sirens blare outside], in this whole process of being sectioned, still going through my recovery process, is the fact that actually I'm super lucky because not only have I found work that is so nourishing for my mind, body, and spirit, I've also learned a valuable lesson in that everything comes from love.

And I know it sounds proper cheesy and it sounds so cliché, but I think it's my love for helping people that's carried me through things, the need for us to be more compassionate towards each other, towards each other's individual situations. I think that's what makes the world go round. That's what makes the world a better place. So that's like, the brief. [laughs]

**Eve**

I'm feeling so many things, different things, as you're describing this situation. You reached out to the police to ask them for help, anticipating that you might have a difficult exchange with your mum. Then she implicates you in criminal activity and you end up becoming arrested and subsequently sectioned. Is it OK to ask you a bit more about how you were feeling during that interaction?

**Ninette**

Oh of course!

**Eve**

What that was like for you?

**Ninette**

I think, well, I know for sure, at that particular point in time my love for humans, as annoying as we all can be, completely shattered. I just couldn't believe that someone who's supposed to be close to me, my mother, completely shattered my interpretation of trust, completely out the window.

And then in addition to that, not that I've had, like, you know, I haven't had the best, how can I say this? Like the police, I mean, I know that, no I don't know that, I was gonna say I know they're doing all that they can, they can certainly do better. In regards to mental health, I feel that it's such a varied sphere that training needs to be implemented. It just doesn't make sense to me that police officers are not trained in this area of things. And that is creating more problems than we can ever imagine.

I mean, let's take for example my particular story of that interaction of the police. It isn't a unique story. There are cases, we read it in the news, we even see it, police are just, it's like, are you using your head here or? It just doesn't make sense that a police officer can come on to the scene of a situation, it clearly is a stressful, highly emotive situation, but to end up getting sectioned after calling the police for assistance. It still kind of blows my mind.

But then, I think what helps me keep going is the fact that it's a clear sign that change is needed. It's a sign that things aren't really working out. And, let's be honest, people have actually died from being in police custody in similar situations. Something just isn't right here. And something needs to be done. So, hopefully, in my being able to share my story, it helps illuminate areas where we can work together to positively impact things, you know?

### **Eve**

I'm seeing this vision, I suppose you could call it, of you with handcuffs on, in distress, and I'm feeling a lot of things all at once. And I'm trying to work out, what those things are and how I relate to them as someone sat beside you listening to that pain. I think there is a really deep anger, and this terror.

### **Ninette**

Yeah, to be honest with you the following year after that happened I would say I was the angriest I've ever been in my existence so far. Because I just felt that, in some ways, that one incident was how the world was for me for a year.

So, the year that followed, I was depressed, I didn't want to go out, I didn't trust people. And I had to, after being sectioned, I had to go and live back with my mum, which was pretty difficult following the actions of what happened on that day. Because, there was no sort of recognition for her part in things, there was no recognition on the police's part in terms of the part that they played.

So, it was almost like, OK this has happened so you've just got to sit with that. And I was sitting with a lot of shame towards myself. And it wasn't right. It wasn't right for me to feel that, somehow, I wasn't good enough and I

deserved that treatment. I started to think that way, which obviously is not the case.

So yeah, it was a difficult time in terms of how I saw myself and how I saw the wider world around me. It was a very difficult time. But, at the same time, even though it was difficult, I think it's just the ultimate blessing that I'm able to be sitting here with you today. You know?

Because I was so convinced after that experience, well that's it, like literally [clicks fingers] that's it Ninette. Life is done. Maybe you're just going to keep on going in and out of mental institutions as a result of trying to comprehend such a nonsense situation that shouldn't have even occurred in the first place.

But I also feel, ultimately, because I do believe in a higher spirit, a higher force, that in some ways it was kind of meant to happen. It's obviously not the ideal situation that somebody is mistakenly sectioned, however it's just strengthened my beliefs. In that, if you do good, eventually good will come to you. It's like the ultimate karma of the universe or something. And I mean, I'm not perfect, by no means am I perfect, but ultimately, every day I wake up to try and be a better person. Not just for myself, but for other people. And for those that follow when I'm just not around on the earth anymore. Like, you get what you put into things.

So as much as that situation was super difficult for me, and I had to jump over so many emotional hurdles, I'm just really glad that I made it out. And I'm able to talk without crying about this situation. If anything anytime I talk about it I feel lighter, I feel less ashamed, I feel like the guilt is just dissipating because there is no space for guilt towards myself in this situation. It's completely misplaced.

### **Eve**

Something that's really strong that I hear in what you say is it's a "nonsense situation". Could I ask you what justification you were given for the decision to section you?

### **Ninette**

OK so the justification was that, in their opinion, which had been informed by my mother, who had not seen me for the whole day, was that my erratic behaviour which was fueled by untrue information, led them to feel that I was acting erratic.

I mean if you had been accused or labelled with something you haven't done, of course, you're going to get upset about it. And again the word insight is just flashing in my mind. The police, for one, are not going to have insight into

how a person behaves when they turn up on the scene. So on their part, they definitely need to exercise less discrimination.

It's difficult for me to feel as though race did not play a part in all of this. It certainly did. Because the police officer who got the ball rolling on the sectioning process made several judgments about me as a person, me being a Black woman. The false belief that Black women are aggressive, we're erratic and we can't be controlled. I mean, what is it that people are trying to control here in regards to Black women? Are we not allowed to be individuals? Are we not allowed to be expressive of how we feel. It's demonised if you're able to express emotions. But we all need to express emotions as humans. If you don't express your emotions, you're keeping them bottled up. And what happens when you bottle things up? Eventually there's going to be some sort of outburst, you know?

Going back to what happened to me, I should be outraged by it. And as much as I said, I had that year of completely seeing red. It's not sustainable. It's not sustainable for me. Why should I have to sit with hate, guilt and shame over a situation that I didn't cause? Why should I have to be a victim here?

And I think this is like one of the thoughts, one of the pennies that dropped [clicks fingers], in the three years that followed the incident, I was like, actually Ninette, why is it you that is sitting in a room with your blinds pulled down, an extra sheet, a black sheet, even covering the blinds to make it even darker in there, when this police officer, he hasn't been cautioned, he hasn't been reprimanded, and he's out there living his life, you know? Not even giving a second thought to how his actions have severely negatively impacted like someone's life. Why do I need to sit with that?

So, essentially, the penny dropped. It took a couple of years, and I was just like, this doesn't make sense. I need to take this experience and use it to find some sort of peace. Peace in being able to find solutions for other people that are facing similar situations to what I've been through. In short that's been one of the key things that have helped me through, being able to help others by speaking truthfully and openly about what happened to me. Because there are other people out there. It's unacceptable. And the more we speak, the more people will just have to listen and something will have to be done.

**Eve**

[deep inhale] Yeah! [both laugh]

**Ninette**

I know it's a lot!

**Eve**

No, no no, I want to make the space for it. You know, I don't want to rush on to the next bit. You know, what is the next bit? I'm trying to make sure that I'm aware of where we're at in this space and not wanting to move things away from where they need to be. And I do have a lot of question marks in my mind about that turning point, you know, the penny drop and how you moved through it. But I'm also, at the same time, really curious about what happened when, you were restrained, you were arrested, you had handcuffs placed on you, it was hurting you, you got taken to the police station...

**Ninette**

Had several panic attacks while in the custody of the police. Which, again, it's these small little details which I think sometimes even I overlook.

Because while I was in their custody I was really distressed, like off the Richter distressed, and nobody came to check on me. No one essentially cared. So to myself, it was almost like I gave up hope too. But, at the end of the day I'm not employed to serve and protect others. That's what the police are supposed to do. I don't know what changed behaviour on the police's part would help me to see them in a different light.

However, as much as I am an optimistic person, there is so much that is going wrong with the police for me to even think about putting one grain of hope into them, it's just, yeah, they need a complete reform in terms of attitudes, in terms of the way that they treat people. Essentially, the police are a gang. They are allowed to conduct themselves in whichever way they see fit. But who actually monitors what they're doing and makes sure that they are doing things in the right, just way? Who is monitoring them? These questions need to be asked. And further to that, we need to be looking into what we can do to ensure that the police are doing what they need to be doing. Because I don't feel that they are. And this situation that I've had to go through is an example and it's not unique to me at all.

**Eve**

I'm imagining you in that police cell needing support, needing someone to help you with how distressed you were feeling, and being in the midst of all those panic attacks, and not having anyone there to help.

**Ninette**

I mean, how does one change their sort of view on the police having gone through that? I just don't see it happening in my lifetime. I don't see it.



I feel that there's more oomph, there's more substance is the word I'm looking for, thank you, gosh, there's more substance in community. There's more substance in the power of people when we stick together. Obviously we've got our own different opinions [sirens blaring outside] our own way of doing things, but on a wider scale if the people were to come together, somehow, we could literally just govern ourselves. We could do. We could do a better job than the police are doing [laughs]. That's for sure [laughs as a siren wails outside the window]. Speaking of which! [laughs]

**Eve**

I know, really appropriately placed siren! I mean... [both laughing]

**Ninette**

Oh, gosh, you just couldn't make it up! [laughs]

**Eve**

You couldn't have written that! [laughs]

**Ninette**

Oh Gosh! And the thing is, in order for these type of serious reforms that the police need, that we need to see from the police, rather, it's going to take people like myself, that have been through these situations, to be working side by side with the police. And irrespective of what has happened to me, I'd be up for that. Because I'm up for improving things.

However, can they sit across the table from me and actually have a conversation and outline where they've gone wrong? If we want to look into specifics about my case, they just can't do that. Because, I just can't see that happening. I don't know. I'm so optimistic but super pessimistic when it comes to the police. Super. Yeah. It's just not good enough. It's not at all.

And I know of several people, several friends and family members, that have been through similar things. They are constantly being harassed by the police for literally looking the way that they do. Imagine waking up and knowing that there's a higher possibility that you're going to get stopped or harassed by the police just because you're Black? This is utter nonsense. It's utter nonsense. It just has to stop.

**Eve**

I'm wondering, as you're talking about the possibility of working with the police and doing this really, really hard, gruelling work of trying to change things, and sharing your story, if I could invite the police to listen to some of your recording, or share it. Because one of the things I'm really keen to do with this whole process is keep it broad and share it with as many people as possible. And bring people into events where we'll listen to some of the recordings together, share them on social media, share them with other

organisations, NHS Trusts, different health bodies around the UK. And I wonder if that's something that you'd be interested in it doing, another place for it?

**Ninette**

Yeah, I mean, you can't, we're talking verbally of course, but you can't see the big smile on my face at the moment! I would love that. And I would love to see their response. I'm all for it. I am all ears. The floor, and the door, has always been open. So let's see. Let's see what they've got to say. Let's see if they really are about making positive, impactful change. Let's see if they can change my mind. I'm open to it.

**Eve**

What would you want to say if you were in that space with people that had some power to change the way that they work with people who are in distressing situations? You know, whether you call it mental health difficulties, whether you don't, that almost feels secondary to what we're talking about, because you were describing how you were pathologised for having what in my mind feels like a very natural reaction to a really scary situation.

**Ninette**

What would I, so essentially what would I say to the police? I would essentially, I put police, police work, people that work for the NHS, that's serving you're serving people, so what I would like to know is, for those that do join the police service, what was the reason that you joined? Like, what is the key motivator in why you were part of the police?

And, I mean of course, it's a rhetorical question, but, I mean, isn't one of the foundational key elements because you like to help people? There has to be some sort of compassion based in why you would want to wake up and protect and serve others. Because if there's no compassion, and there's no empathy, you shouldn't have a place in these kind of heavily people facing roles.

A key thing, which is so basic in terms of like perspective, is you just treat other people how you would like to be treated. So for those police officers that are called to highly stressful situations, try putting the person that you love the most on the receiving end of your behaviour. Then maybe that might invigorate some brain cells to perk up and think, "Actually, I wouldn't want somebody treating somebody I love like this, so maybe I need to change my ways". Perhaps you just need to put yourself in the position of the people that you are, quote unquote, serving, you know? Literally.

Because it can happen to anyone. Anyone can be stressed out about life, about environmental issues, friends, family, we are all human, we bleed the same. We've got, who knows how long on earth? So why can we not work

together to make the world a more thriving place for everyone, irrespective of what colour they are, or what beliefs they have?

So I know it's not a question [laughs] it was like a long-winded statement. But yeah, let's open up the conversation. Let's get different perspectives in. And let's work together, if you're able to. And I say the "if" being on the police side of things. Because I think it's too easy for them to use key words like "diversity" and "change". These are just buzzwords. What actions are you putting into place to backup the talk? Let's see it. Like, let's see [laughs].

**Eve**

It's really interesting that you're starting this whole process with a question. You were wanting to know why people had come into the job. I think it's really powerful to start with wanting to know what's the motivation for the other person. You're really digging into...

**Ninette**

...the roots.

**Eve**

Yeah, going straight to the root.

**Ninette**

Like why? Like what motivates people to do what they do, essentially? And I say it's on a par with like NHS workers because these are really stressful jobs. And of course, no one would willy nilly walk into a profession of that nature unless they really had some space in their heart to help others. I mean that would have to be foundational to things.

So, like, in my work with the NHS, and bless them, you can tell people are overworked, you can tell people are tired, but at the end of the day, there are people, a lot of other people like myself, that are just driven to want to make the world a better place. To help other people. Now more than ever, we really need to just look at how things are working and what needs to be improved, especially where mental health is concerned.

I can't stress enough how much more conversations we need like this. How many more conversations we need to have in order for people to just stop stigmatising the fact that sometimes people are going to have mental distress. It's pretty normal. Look at the type of world that we live in, the wars, the complete outrage, the unjust things that are happening on a day-to-day basis, it would make sense that some people just find it difficult to cope.

We need to adopt an approach of less judgement. There's no space for that. We really need to be looking at why is, are people behaving like this? What is the trigger here? What is the reason why? Because there's always context.

There's always context to everything. And we need to start looking into that, rather than judging things on face appearance. Like just grow up, in short!  
[laughs]

**Eve**

It's interesting you're bringing mental health services back into the conversation again. Because they were involved in you being sectioned, and ending up in the hospital. And I'm really interested in what happened during that time for you and how you felt about the care, I want to say, you received. But that's an assumption that you found it caring.

**Ninette**

[laughs] Yeah, I mean, the first time, the first and only time I was sectioned really, there were some staff members, and bless I remember them being kind of key to making me feel as comfortable as I could do in such an uncomfortable situation.

However, at the same time, I do recall very vividly, as I do now in the work that I do in the NHS, of seeing a lot of people that are doing jobs, that they literally just turn up, show up and leave. No emotion. Why would you put yourself in that situation? Not only is it detrimental to the person that's doing work that they just don't enjoy, I mean, I don't know what the repercussions of that look like. But for the people that you're engaging with, these are people's lives. How can you take something like that so lightly, people's health? You can't just go and buy another brain if you're suffering from mental health difficulty. It takes a lot of work.

And it takes the right people that are motivated by the right things to help in somebody's recovery process, or to help when somebody is having mental health issues. You need the right people. It is so key to everything, having the right people with the right intentions.

Yeah, I forget the initial point, but like literally the right people for the right, with the right morals? It's not even really morals, it's just basic, if you're going to work with people you have to give a damn about people, you know? It's as simple as that. You don't need a PhD to figure it out. If you're going to work with people you have to care.

**Eve**

Did people give a damn about you when you were in hospital?

**Ninette**

No! [laughs] And the thing is, I had to care. I had to care more for myself.

I think if anything, another key thing that I'm taking away from it is I needed people to treat me in this unjust way so I could step up the love for myself. In

a world that is constantly telling me who to be or what I am, without any context, I needed to love myself. I needed to see the beauty in being Ninette, which I do now.

I mean, it's been such a rough road but everything has its place. I needed this experience in order to make me a better citizen in the community. I needed these bad things to happen because good doesn't exist without bad. It's like the ultimate balance.

So, even though bad things have happened to me I'm still going to do my ultimate best to be the best I can be. Because I see what the knock on effect is of that - everybody wins.

Bethlem  
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Backing  
Better  
Mental  
Health.

NHS  
South London  
and Maudsley  
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