

Elizabeth Beech

First of all, can I just ask you, Liz, to give me an idea of how did you come to be a part of Greenham?

Well, I was living at the time in Somerset, in Glastonbury. And we'd already had a women's group, which was quite well attended. And on some occasion, the group - a member of the group suggested we went to see this film at her house, which was by Helen Caldicott. I think it was called Critical Mass - as far as I remember. Anyway, it was a very coherent film about the effects of nuclear weapons. And we all came out extremely energised. And then, seemed to be a short while afterwards - I think that film did the rounds and was quite a sort of starting point, I think for the huge anti-nuclear thing. I think, I'd already years before been involved in the Aldermaston marches, and things like that. So I was already anti-nuclear to begin with, but that film really seemed to kick something off. And then one of the group also heard about the Embrace the Base action at Greenham, and we organised a coach and given how small Glastonbury is, we filled the coach really quickly. And perchance I was sitting next to Fay Weldon on the coach because she lived in Shepton Mallet at the time. And we sang songs, and we didn't have any clear idea about numbers or anything. But when we got onto the M4, all the way along there were coaches and it was clearly all women going to Greenham. And so we began to get a very clear picture before we even got there, that this was going to be huge. And we got to the main gate, I don't think we got as far as that - the coach pulled in and said, it would pick us up at whatever the agreed time was 6 o'clock or something - the other side of the road from where we were. If you remember, it was just December, so anyway, we got out and walked up to what I then learnt was the main gate, and gathered there, and started spreading out along the fence. And the rest is history. I mean, you know, we surrounded the base. And there was something about the atmosphere that was absolutely extraordinary. And at that point, I thought - and women were already living there - at that point, I thought I want to live here. But at the time, I had a - trying to think how

old they were - six and four, and my four year old was still in playgroup, and I thought well I can't come here until he is at school. My husband was theoretically very - turned out, turns out to be a bit of a not quite true, but anyway, at the time, he was very supportive of my support of Greenham. And so my plan was he was due to go to school in September of '83. So my plan was to go to Greenham in September '83. In the event, I went in October '83. But anyway, that was the plan, and I, in-between Embrace the Base and that October I visited quite often - stayed for a weekend, and got to know women and so on, and got to know the ropes a bit - what ropes that there were, which were a bit chaotic. But anyway, I found that very interesting. So that was basically how I got involved.

That's really interesting. So when you were going and visiting the base initially, before you actually started to stay there, um, were you visiting a number of gates or had you already identified...

No, I seemed to, I did visit Orange and Green.

Yes.

Mainly because they were in walking distance. I didn't have any transport - very few of us did. And Green seemed a bit sort of full on green, I guess. And Orange seemed - I mean, we had different views about each of the gates, and Orange seem to be rather straight, some of us thought.

When you say straight, can you just sort of...

Well, it was kind of Quakers, and Christians of one sort, I mean not that there's anything...

No, no, no, but that was sort of what they termed the religious gate was it?

Sort of - it evolved, I mean it wouldn't have have been called spiritual because that was more assigned to Green. And Blue was the sort of young punks, I did spend quite a lot of time at Blue in-fact, but that was kind of pink hair and shouting! (Laughs).

And just go to Green - how would you have identified them?

Well I identify them as already very eco aware, and mostly vegetarian. Yes and quite avowedly peaceful. But that had - it was the opposite of the shouting. But all of it was performance in my view, from start to finish, you know, each of the gates adopted a persona.

Right. And so let's go to the Yellow Gate you tended to identify with - what were the characteristics of Yellow?

Well I personally identified it as the most radical gate. It was the gate that seemed to mostly provide the ideas for actions, and so on. That's how it appeared to me. But I mean, it's all incredibly subjective, which is why I think very little has been written about it. Because each of us who were there were very subjective, and it would just create huge uproar. I mean, some of the things I've said, I think when I'm saying them I can hear people say 'Oh, she would say that'. (Laughs). You know, it was kind of quite - what would the word be? Yeah, very subjective. I think our experiences were very subjective. I mean, I think people went to Greenham, fell in love with Greenham as an idea. And then picked the sort of partner they'd live with at Greenham, which gate, in other words, kind of thing, and Yellow seemed to be my gate.

Right. Right. How interesting. So, er, initially, you were going at weekends, and then October '83...

October '83 - well, this is what this is one of those stories that is unprovable, and it might be in my imagination, which is how I remember it. I was planning to go anyway. And then I had my 40th birthday in October '83, and my mother gave me an electric kettle. I was so outraged that what I got for my 40th birthday was an electric kettle. I

mean, I had an electric kettle, obviously, who didn't! And I thought I wanted something for me. It's my 40th for heaven's sake, and this electric kettle. So my story - I wrote a poem about it at the time. My story was I went to Greenham because of an electric kettle, which of course I didn't! From the time I got to Greenham, electric kettles were out of the question. But anyway, that's my story. So I know exactly, I went on October 20th - I went a day after my 40th birthday to live there.

So you, you had plans to go anyway - you didn't just walk out and leave the kettle? (Laughs).

No, no. I didn't! No, no, I did have plans anyway. But it fitted rather neatly. It gave me an added impetus, somehow - this rather ungrateful girl that I am - not wanting this brand new electric kettle! I'd rather have had Chanel number five or something. It's an indication that my mother knew that luxury was sometimes what women wanted.

Would you say that, okay, you identified at Yellow Gate. Do you feel that Yellow Gate defined you? Or you helped define Yellow Gate?

I think possibly the latter. Only in that I had a - I don't think, I mean I had a very difficult entry to Yellow Gate because I was, I think I was considered to be posh. Um, wasn't a lesbian. Had four sons.

By that stage four sons?

Yeah.

Oh, my goodness, right.

And I think one way or the other, and I was very, very attached to non-violence. So I was constantly raising issues to do with 'No, we can't throw paint at police policemen in-case they get injured'. I was always working through any action we were taking, what the possible consequences of that action might be. And I think I irritated meetings

enormously. I wasn't popular, let's say. Let's put it like that. You know, I think I was considered to be a bit, sort of a bit of a party pooper.

Interesting. Do you think there would have been another gate that you would have been accepted more in, but you chose Yellow because you felt you could have more impact? Sorry, I don't want to put words into your mouth. But...

No, I don't, I think really, it was a question of the fact that despite everything I'm saying, I also did have very good friends there. I made friends with certain women really quite easily. And I enjoyed their company, and I enjoyed aspects compared with a couple of other gates I spent a short while at. Don't be annoying Sonny. Composing songs and you know, just some of the stories around the fire were very interesting. And I suppose it was the first port of call for lots of women. So lots of women coming to Greenham would arrive at - at that time it was called Main Gate. We had to call it Yellow after a while, because it was considered to be hierarchical, calling it Main Gate. And I think there was a certain truth to that. I do think that that we did have a certain sense of importance there, not least, because that's generally speaking, where the convoy came out. So it was kind of the front line in a certain sort of way, though, I would suggest that it wasn't our - we worked quite hard to be non hierarchical. Though ultimately, I'm not sure that succeeded, but away. I mean, that issue of leadership is incredibly complicated, as we all know. I mean, one can have all the best will in the world, but carrying it through, as we've noticed from our situation right now in politics is very, very difficult. Because people want leaders, the media certainly wanted there to be leaders. And we were very clear about that one, I know we were very clear about, that we would not provide the media with spokespeople, which is what they wanted, they always liked somebody to be the spokesperson, the fall guy, really. And we were very adamant about that. But no, I think as far as my relationship with it was concerned, it was partly around friendship, partly familiarity. I mean, it's quite a big step to go and live in a bender on the side of a main road. And once you're settled in, and you've got a

sort of rhythm going, it's very difficult to want to up sticks and move. So apart from spending bits of time at Blue, mainly, that's where I was.

Did you have your children with you there?

No, they came up on occasion. In-fact, interestingly, my son who's now 40 set up - he's an architectural historian.

Was he the eldest?

Yeah, yes. No, it wasn't - my eldest lives in Hong Kong, and he's in his 50s.

Oh, right, right. That was the number two.

Yeah, he's three, in-fact.

Three, sorry.

And he's, he's set up a conference at Birkbeck earlier on this year, for Greenham women and their children. We had a lot of difficulty finding Greenham women with children who wanted to take part. But quite a big attendance. And it was very interesting hearing the children's, well now grown up children's view of Greenham and their experience. And so those are the two youngest. Sonny, what are you doing...

Do you want to - you can just sit on the recorder. Don't worry! No, that's really interesting. Can you just give me an idea, how many women were at - we're living at a gate at Yellow Gate at one time?

The maximum at Yellow at any time was forty, it was really busy around - immediately after Embrace the Base. By the time I got there in the October, it was not only a camp by the gate itself, there was also one in something we called The Clearing, which was just away from the Main Gate. And there were a lot of - I think there were about forty at that time. Generally speaking outside of the big actions, there weren't

actually that many women there at any one time, probably a maximum of forty or fifty, I would say. But the impression given, because it got such huge media attention was it it was packed all the time. So people got an impression of thousands and thousands of women, where in-fact, I think something about that little gathering, when we went over to Leicester Square, you know, for - reflected that, because lots of women had visited, but there was only one woman there who had actually lived at the camp. And it was sort of really obvious. The minute she came up to the table, although I didn't know her from Greenham, I knew she was an actual Greenham woman - there was something about her whole manner which just said to me, yes, you were at Greenham weren't you. And the others bless them, certainly had every right to be there. But they hadn't actually lived there. So the conversation would kind of go, and then go bleueurgh, because they didn't actually know what we were talking about. So, there weren't actually that many women there full time.

So you moved permanently there October '83.

Yes.

And I understand, were you there permanently 'til '87?

Well, more or less, I didn't go home as much as some women - I didn't seem - some women seemed to burn out quite fast. I think probably because I didn't rush about as much as some of them...

Conserved the energy!

I was the middle aged crew! And so I, I didn't seem to need that much of a break. So I used to go home probably for a weekend once every 3 months or something, then the children would come up and one thing, and friends would come up because the Glastonbury group were very supportive. They'd come up, and you know, bring sort of items that we needed for the camp, and so on and so forth.

Can I just take you right back to the beginning, you talked about the women's group that formed in Glastonbury. Was that specifically CND? Or was it...

No, it was more consciousness raising, it was more women's stuff. You know, it was as an offshoot from the '70s stuff really.

Right. What would you call it? A women's...

We just called it a women's group.

A women's group?

Yeah, it was just a women's group. And when I say just, I mean, there were still, there are subjects that are still being discussed to this day. I mean, I can't believe how long it's been going on. To do with the patriarchy, and so on, because I've been in a group in Bristol, with an artist called Monica Sjoo, who brought women's lib over from America. That was way, way back in the early '70s, she started the first women's group in England. Quite a well known, she wrote a - she painted a very famous painting called God Giving Birth. And god was, of-course, a woman. And it got banned all over the place. And she made a sort of huge name for herself as a feminist painter. And she had this women's group in Bristol. And then when I left Bristol, and I left - I left that group because they wouldn't allow male children into the creche. And I had two male children who were under the age of 3. And I just was outraged and said 'It's absolutely ridiculous.' And they said 'Well, they're boys.' And I said 'Yes, I've noticed.'

I mean, what was the rationale?

Well the rationale was they were going to be men. And we couldn't have male energy in the group. So I walked out on the basis of that, as I've walked out of many groups, on their various sort of red lines, I think they're known as these days.

Well, actually, that leads on to the question, I was going to ask you - sort of how and why do you think the decision was taken for Greenham to be women's only?

Well, I think it was, you know, and it remains to this day, as far as I'm concerned, within political activism the case that it's very difficult to maintain non-violence in mixed groupings. I mean, at the moment, the Extinction Rebellion groups seem to be doing extremely well with that. I'm very impressed with them. But that's the only group I've come across since Greenham who have a truly dedicated element to them about non-violence, and really want to explore it as a topic. I mean, not just the obvious, but also the violence within ourselves in terms of thoughts, and how we might be subconsciously acting on that a lot of the time. And, you know, taking that really seriously as a way forward. So I think that was...

Actually excuse my ignorance, because I'm not aware of the extension, sorry Extinction Rebellion group.

Extinction Rebellion is a relatively new group, which is set up to say that climate change is the most important issue on planet. I mean, they're on sort of David Attenborough territory. And we must act now. And they've created - I went on their first thing in Parliament Square. And they've done amazingly well with non-violence. I mean, really well, in the, you know, they give people really clear pieces of paper saying 'Be friendly with policemen, they're people too, and they're being affected by climate change. There's no need to be shouting at people', and they really do keep a very tight ship on it.

And it's both men and women?

Yeah.

Yes. Yeah.

And I've been very impressed with it. They've had several events, and even you know, the police themselves admit that it, it we, as we all know, it's tricky for them when, when it's like that, because if they go charging in they're in deep trouble when it's been so obvious.

Who has been the driving force towards this?

It's a group called Rise Up, who came out of the Occupy Movement I was also involved with Occupy, so that's how I got wind of it. I didn't know about except somebody from Occupy mailed me about it. So I went to the first one.

So it has been driven by women initially?

No, no, by mainly a group of people who have been involved in the squatting movement.

Right.

And I think they've had to learn, you know, I mean, the network, obviously, as everybody knows, is quite wide. I mean, if you're in these networks, you get to hear about everything.

And so the fact that it was women only, what did that mean to you at the time?

Well, at the time, it was just a relief, because it was so difficult to persuade - I mean, it was, was also a nightmare, because it meant that all, everything shifted from the nuclear issue on to the why, why no men issue. You spent more time sitting around with visitors discussing that, than anything at all to do with a nuclear weapon, you'd have to be, I'd have to be really firm and say 'Look, I don't want to talk about this anymore. I'm here to stop nuclear weapons.' And then, you know, back, they'd go and say 'But why can't men help you stop them?' And then I'd explain that, you know, we feel that without civil disobedience, it wasn't

going to stop. And it was very difficult to keep things calm when enacting civil disobedience.

Did you, do you feel that men had a role within Greenham, either supportive, or um..?

Well, that was our aim, our hope - was that men would understand that, you know, their role on this occasion, I mean, not permanently, but on this occasion was to keep the home fires burning. Women had done for generations while they went off and did their thing.

And do you think that was successful to a certain extent?

Well, I think to a certain extent, it was I mean, I think there are quite a few, well certainly, I mean, all my sons were pretty supportive. And my husband appeared to be to start with, because lack of support, grew with his inability really to keep the home fires burning, and he went into debt and my own personal opinion is that that's why our marriage broke down. It wasn't so much to do with Greenham, although that was what was cited. I think it was actually that he didn't cope. Which is a whole different issue.

Yeah.

Quite honestly.

It's a very interesting issue. We could spend two hours talking about that, but anyway.

Back onto the men again!

Absolutely. I mean, were men involved at all in things like the Cruise Watch, or anything like that?

Not that I can recall, no. You'd have to ask Di about that. No, I don't think so. I mean, we did - on Embrace the Base, they were asked to

make the sandwiches and tea. They made the sandwiches at Orange Gate and brought them around rather proudly on sort of catering trays. And I can remember they got an inordinate amount of praise, which I refused to take part in, for making these sandwiches. I said 'Good god, anybody can make a marmite sandwich - it wasn't even sort of egg or anything. Really the simplest thing in the world, and I thought it was quite 'matronising', to suggest they've done a fantastic job by making marmite sandwiches. Um. But yes, it was some time ago, and you know, women have had to work very hard to obtain women only spaces. And it's still not clearly understood what that's about and why. And if that's the case, I mean, I just feel, sometimes I just feel like screaming because it's like, didn't you get it the first time around? It's not as simple as it's not 'not liking men'. It's keeping a space safe with male presence is extremely difficult, given that most men don't recognise what other men are like. Let's say, you know, they are (inaudible) itself, and still seem incapable of recognising what their brothers are capable of.

Just wondering, I mean, to what extent do you feel that Greenham was about women, rather than about anti-nuclear?

Well, I still think it was about - I mean, it's difficult, isn't it? I mean part of me thinks it was about how one might achieve a successful political action, which I always feel to some extent Greenham was, in other words, successful direct action. I think that's what we worked very hard on, and we were very creative with. And I think it was about women to some extent, because I recognised probably almost subsequent to Greenham that what they really - 'they', I mean, authorities really disliked, was us living our lives in public. They don't like women hanging up their dirty - well, clean washing in public, it meant the domestic was all too visible. And it reminded me of the fact that my husband hated me to do the ironing in the evenings, it was as if he didn't want to see that I had to do any work. You know, he'd had a myth that I was just sort of at home playing with the children, as if there was nothing else to do. And I think aspects of Greenham were to do with men finding it really difficult to have what they considered to be hordes of women, in-fact,

they might only be twenty, getting up and brushing their teeth, and this that and the other, visible to them.

It's interesting, just as you were saying that, I was wondering, did your husband have people to talk to about it? I mean, did he have...

Well I would have thought so, I mean, I don't know. Because the problem was, once it stopped, it stopped. You know, I was never able to really ask him.

No, I was just sort of during the time.

No, during the time there certainly were...

Other men around...

Because there had been...

He had buddies?

Yes. Exactly. But I think probably they were as confused as he was really about - because I'm trying to think, yes, it had been - by the time I moved there I was present during the discussions about women only. But that happened before I actually moved there, it had become women only, but I was around. Because it all happened when the peace convoy were down at Green Gate. The peace convoy being Travellers.

Right. And that was when?

Many of whom were male. And that was when when the issue arose, because they were, they were camping down what became Green Gate, in that area.

And that was before you actually got there?

That was before I got there. That was from the beginning, from '81. And I think they thought they were very supportive. But I think it's - my feeling is it's sometimes difficult for men to recognise they're being aggressive. I think they think they're being firm, or manly or something. And they don't realise that, or maybe don't realise - I've watched them subsequently on many, many demonstrations talking with policemen. And you think, you idiot if you say that, you're going to really antagonise them - doesn't have to occur to you? And I think that they found us quite difficult to deal with in that way.

Yes.

I always remember a particular occasion when there was a convoy due to come out, I think I think it was a convoy - anyway it was late evening, probably 11 o'clock or something. And there was a kerfuffle going on at the gate. And I remember going on to the fire and putting the kettle on. And the next thing I knew I seemed to be surrounded by policemen, and they said very gruffly 'What are you doing?' I said 'I'm making a cup of tea. Would you like one?' And they really didn't like that at all. 'Don't be funny with us.' And I said 'I'm just asking, that's what I'm doing. And I'm asked if you'd like a cup of tea.' But anyway, they weren't having that, and they sort of barreled off and left me alone. But I remember thinking then they really don't like this. They really don't like anything normal. They want it all to be high drama. You know, they'd much rather I'd have stood there with some sort of small weapon or something.

Would you say that Greenham was a method of claiming territory, either from the government, or military, patriarchy?

No, I think it was, I think it was. I think that's more complicated than it was. I think it was literally nuclear weapon, end of. You know, the Russians weren't our enemy. We were in the middle of all that propaganda with the notion you know that Soviets are about to bomb us at any moment. Then this ridiculous notion of trundling huge convoys, mile long convoys, around Berkshire, and nobody noticing. I mean, only Americans could have come up with such a silly idea. Because they

didn't recognise the terrain. I mean, I think they were imagining doing it in, I don't know - Arizona or somewhere, where you could possibly have a mile long convoy, and nobody much notice. But I mean, in the middle of Berkshire, it was going to be impossible.

Trying to get around our lanes!

They didn't like it when we said things like that. I remember attending a number of meetings with NATO, NATO, you know, we used to have these sort of ludicrous public meetings with NATO generals and people, and Greenham women, and various politicians, and so on. I remember one, you know, this NATO general, and he wasn't pleased when I said 'Have you looked at the situation? Have you looked at Berkshire? Have you looked at Newbury? Have you looked at where you're trying to get to? We none of us know where you're going to trundle these missiles off to, which forests, you imagine are nearby that you can launch your missiles from? But it's ludicrous. You'll just hold up traffic, and everybody will know they're on the road. And any idea of secrecy is just ludicrous.' And he wasn't at all pleased. He said 'I suggest,' - I think he even said something like 'Young lady' - I was 42 or something at the time. He said 'I think you should leave' - more or less bother your pretty little head with these rather complicated military matters.

Where were these meetings - up at the base?

No, they used to be organised by various groups who would then contact us and ask for a speaker. And they usually pay expenses for us to go to wherever it was it happened to be. So it might be in Reading, it might be in London, might be anywhere, you know, and then you just travel and go to these meetings, and take on these rather difficult people.

How did the non-violent direct action work, and how did you use it?

Well, I think we used it mainly just by - I think we had various techniques, which included singing being a very good way of distracting

from anything that was going on. Um, sitting - all sorts of ways in which you will be passive, rather than active. And imagining outcomes, in other words, wherever you were situated, imagining worst scenarios, worst case scenarios, so you weren't taken by surprise. Because mostly, the problem with non-violence is if something completely unexpected happens, and somebody panics. So we'd have legal observers, emotional observers - so they were people specially - we were all trained in different roles. So that we were there to notice if somebody was getting upset, or wasn't looking comfortable. Go over and have a word with them, and see if they were okay.

That's within the women?

Yeah, yeah. All sorts of ways of trying to determine that non-violence was going to work, rather than not. Because regardless of all of that, the police could still be quite brutal. They'd come roaring in, and kind of drag women aside, and fling them into a ditch or something. And it was important to check they were okay. Note if they weren't, then take the police up on it. Make sure that any women who were arrested were followed down into Newbury, and we, you know, we'd go up to the desk and ask the desk sergeant to tell us who had been arrested.

This is now in the police station?

Yeah. And when they were likely to be released, and make sure we were there to pick women up. In other words, make a difficult situation as safe as possible, basically. And I think that was really helpful.

Can you sort of - obviously, you were present at one of these confrontations with police. Can you sort of describe what happened, if you...

It's like...

I mean, I've seen footage, but obviously you were actually there.

Obviously, you're kind of - I think the blockades is something a bit different. Because there's such a lot of you, that there's, it does have a feeling of safety in numbers, and then it all happens incredibly quickly. And then it's over. And generally speaking, not that many women were arrested, I think the more difficult ones were the individual actions. I mean, I took part in a couple of those, where you're cutting the fence and going in, and so on. And then there's - but, you know, it's just, you're nervous, obviously. Nip of brandy before you start, logical things! But I think the main, the main thing about it is generally you don't take part in an action apart from on the blockades with somebody you don't know very well. So you've got sort of affinity groups. And that really helps, because you've got each other. It's like, you know, you just go and do something together. And that makes a lot of difference because you know, somebody who's got your back, as it were, and is also there to witness for you - if something does happen. You're not on your own. It's not like going off on your own.

Were you arrested, or confronted with the police?

Yes.

Can you describe what happened?

Well, basically you're kind of popped into one of those black mariah van things.

What were you arrested for - for a blockade?

I was arrested for cutting the fence and taking a 12' crucifix into the base, which the court case was more amusing than the actually event. As they claimed not to know what I was carrying on Good Friday. Anyway...

So this is on Good Friday?

Yeah, it was in response to the Christmas - that Christmas, I think it was the Christmas of '83. They had put a 'Peace on Earth' illuminated sign above the silos. And I was so outraged, I'd already decided then and there, I was going to do something at Easter, to challenge this 'Peace on Earth' on top of the silos. And so arranged with a couple of other women to go in on Good Friday, cut the fence, take a - we borrowed a 12' tall wooden crucifix from Catholic Peace Action. And took, took that in. And I was reading - my idea was I was going to read right through The Passion. So I took in a Bible as well, and stood there reading from this. And within, you know, quite a short time the troops kind of rolled up in their Landrovers.

And it was the troops?

Yeah, rather than the police, and got out, and stood back for a bit. And then they realised this was going to go on and on and on. So then they, but once you've done that, there's no question you can get up and move away, which is usually on a blockade what you're told - you'll be arrested unless you, but of-course on occasion like that, you're going to be done for criminal damage, regardless. So eventually, one of them stepped in and said 'Right enough of that', well, he was American, so he didn't say it like that. You'll, you know, I think it was probably they had to radio through for the police. And then the police arrived on the outside of the fence. And then they came in and took us out, confiscated the bolt cutters, and blahdy blahdy blah. And the cross.

So it was actually the British police that came on to American territory?

Well, no, they stayed outside the fence, interestingly.

And then we were driven down into Newbury nick, where we stayed for - I don't know, not very long, fingerprinted...

Within a day?

Overnight I think it was, or something or barely overnight. I remember they bought us chips for supper. And you know, it was wasn't unpleasant actually, it was sort of fine. I think they were probably easier on the actions than they were on the blockades. I think their blockades irritated them more, because they had more women to deal with. And, and it was all sort of silly, because sometimes they'd chuck people to the side of the road, and then they just got up, and sat down again. So I think they got very annoyed and frustrated at that point. So I think there was more danger of getting hurt on a blockade, than there was at an action in a funny kind of way - depending on what you were doing.

So having had fingers taken - fingers taken! Sorry! (Laughs).

Not quite that bad! (Laughs).

Right, so without your fingers now! No, but and then you stayed - did they release?

Well, I remember irritatingly, yes, they did. But they very kindly they drove us to Blue Gate. They knew we were from Yellow. So we had to walk right around the base to get home. So it was a five mile walk round.

So from then?

And then you just wait for the court case.

And sort of what length of time was that?

Um, 3 months probably.

And that was held in?

Newbury.

Newbury, right. Okay, so evidence comes up. How accurate was it?

Oh, it was ludicrously ridiculous. I mean, the actual evidence was fairly accurate, you know, entry of the bass with an object - as they described it. And, you know, the main thing was the cutting of the fence from their point of view. So obviously, that was incon... - I mean, I didn't, I pleaded not guilty to criminal damage. Not to not cutting the fence. I mean, I pretty quickly agreed I had cut the fence - not least there were two other women who otherwise would have been charged with cutting the fence. Um. So then I ended up cross examining this young American squaddy - I don't know what he was really, what rank he was. I asked him if he could describe the object that had been brought in. He had huge difficulty with that. He said 'It was very big, was very tall.' So I said 'Well, did it resemble anything to you?' So he looks at me as if I were talking Chinese. I said 'I mean, did it look like anything you'd ever seen before?' He said, 'No'!

(Laughs). That says it all!

And then I said 'Would you call yourself a Christian?' And he said 'Yes.' And then he went further and said he was a Catholic. So I said 'Well, I feel you must be able to recognise the object that I brought into the base?' Nothing occurred to him. I said, so then I tried another attack, and said 'Do you remember what day it was?' He said, he gave the date was sometime in April. I said 'No, but it had a particular name, this day. Do you remember what day it was?' He still couldn't remember. So I said 'Well, in the Christian calendar, it's called Good Friday.' Oh 'Yes', he said. So he suddenly did remember it was Good Friday. And then I said 'So any recollection of what the object was?' 'No, no recollection.' So he then (phone makes noise) - is that me or you? So anyway, eventually, I thought this is silly, the court's getting bored. So I said, 'Right, well, it was a crucifix.' 'Ah', he said...

Revelation! (Laughs).

Revelation, exactly. So, the long and the short of that story was, on the grounds - what the magistrate said was on the grounds that it appeared,

I don't - I mean I think it was bit anti-American, to be honest - but on the grounds that this soldier seemed incapable of recognising a very commonly understood object, which made him nervous for the security of the nation! He did make quite a little speech, he said 'I'm going to give her conditional discharge' - condition being that I didn't do criminal damage again, within a year, I think it was. But anyway very unusually, usually people, regardless of how good their defense appeared to be, got done anyway, but I think the thing was so ridiculous. And his answers were so ridiculous, that he made it look like a stitch up. He was probably hoping to make it seem - I don't know what he was trying to make - I think he was probably embarrassed to admit that he knew it was a crucifix. But I did get the opportunity at the end, you know, to say, why, because of this 'Peace on Earth' above the silos. And he said 'Do you, are you a practicing Christian?' I said 'No, I'm no, but I was brought up as a Catholic. And I still find it - found it an outrageous statement to make.' And so anyway, so that's that little story.

No, very interesting. Did you have any interaction with bailiffs?

Yes, plenty.

Yeah, at what stage was that?

Well, that was during, after the big eviction which was in '84 - May, I think '84, which was when the whole camp was cleared. They took place almost daily. So I eventually ended up with almost - all, everything I needed on a bicycle. Because it was so, so that when the bailiffs - the whole thing was pointless. They used to come usually in the morning, sort of 8, 9 o'clock, clear the camp. And then we'd all come back again. And then they come in the next day, and so on and so on. It went on and on and on. And then eventually there was something - I can't remember quite what precipitated, it must have got harsher, or they must have got, got rid of all the tents or something because we - I used to be able to pack up my tent and have it on the bicycle. But I must have - they must have done something, because we didn't have any

shelter because I know I ended up sleeping in a Gore-Tex in the open for 2 months. Completely in the open.

Goodness!

Crazy, isn't it, but the Gore-Texes were excellent, they do work. They were designed for, I don't know, Antarctic expeditions, or Everest or something. But anyway, we were donated a whole lot of them and they did actually work. You could sleep in the dry, out in the open,

What a wonderful advert! They should have had you advertising it! In terms of relationships with other parties. I mean, what was - what sort of relationship did you see that between the women and local residents?

Well, tricky. Because we were banned from so many places, including pubs that I mean, we had no relationship with the town really at all. It was their idea. There was some shops that would serve us, but you know, was definite and it was very antagonistic at times. I mean we had people throwing lighted torches into the tent area. You know, really dangerous stuff going on. We had a very big fire on one occasion, it was very scary. Because it looked, it looked as though - we weren't sure that whether there had been anybody in this rather large tent that had been burned to the ground. So that was really worrying. No, the locals were very anti. In the main - not totally, but in the main. It must be very difficult for the people who weren't.

Always much more aware of the antagonistic, than the more peaceful.

But I mean there was some very brave, peaceful souls who used to come to the camp, and reassure us in that way. But not the whole world wasn't against us, in that sense.

So just showing their solidarity?

Showing their solidarity, and often bringing things - blankets and clothes and things.

Yeah, yeah. Um, if you saw Greenham represented artistically, what would it look like?

Um, it would look like a bender, and trees, and a fire - fire is absolutely essential, because the fire was really the heart of Greenham. Without the fire it wouldn't - couldn't have operated. Because that's what we cooked on, kept warm by, cups of tea - I mean it had everything to recommend it. Washing up, everything. Fire for living outside is the most important thing - I must try and do Bear Grylls method for lighting a fire - rubbing two sticks together, which is one element I've never mastered to do with fires. But I always do, I encourage people quite seriously, to carry a lighter with them, regardless of whether they smoke or not. Just because building a fire is the most important issue to do with survival that there is. So I'd make the fire the central point. Because that's sort of where everything was decided, where all the comfort came from. So yeah, yeah, essentially it's the fire.

How well do you think art was actually used at Greenham as a sort of political...

I think it was used very well, I mean, I, I did quite a lot of work there in one way or the other. I used to mainly do embroidery, because that seemed to annoy them enormously as well, because I think it's considered to be quite an upper class leisurely activity. And I remember on one occasion, it was a very lovely embroidery, I'm still not pleased about it to this day, it was about half the size of this table, the piece of linen. And it was just a random sort of meadow of flowers. And I used to sit around the fire most afternoons sewing it. And one afternoon, this MOD plod came at a run, grabbed it out of my hand and ran off with it - it was about three quarters completed. And I was really upset about that. I just thought oh, you know, monster. That is just so - I mean, it was quite clever on his part. Because it was really distressing.

Yeah, it might almost seem like a sort of appliqué of joining up sheets, but drawn on, or done appliqués, were you a part of that?

Yeah, well, we were doing stuff a lot of the time, mainly to put on the fence, but not exclusively, sometimes we just used to carry them. And then when we would bring them - I mean, there was quite a lot of I think creatively, it was mainly music and visuals, probably inevitably because of the living situation. But again, this is why I think Extinction Rebellion are doing very well, because they are very good on the creative side. And most of the actions between Greenham and now have been very poor on - Occupy was dreadful like that, it was impossible to get Occupy to understand - composing songs and, you know, creating a song book of one sort or another. And good visuals are important to a movement, because they enable people who can't necessarily be part of it, you know, to at-least have an acknowledgement in their window. We used to do a number of posters and things that they could put in their windows. So they, the idea was every window in a particular street would have one of these posters, because those things are important.

How effective do you think that was?

I think it is very effective.

That was, but at the time, did it work?

Yes. Well, I mean, it's hard to tell isn't it. Everything's hard to tell. But I think the fact that it was so hugely publicised - Greenham was, couldn't complain of lack of publicity. The fact it was mostly negative is almost irrelevant. The fact that it was absolutely known. That was almost daily.

Yes, yes. Um the, what was, as I understand it, decisions tended to be taken collectively is that...

Consensually. You'll know, a bit like the men issue, consensus is so flippin' difficult. Um, and I've, I mean, it might be an ideal, but it's definitely in my view, the only way we can go - I mean this is what's being attempted with Brexit, haha. Because it is so difficult. And we, in my opinion, we did better with that in Occupy than we did at Greenham,

but I've learned so much from Greenham that it really helped me in the Occupy process. Because we learned to - partly at Greenham, but the main thing is that you must have excellent facilitators. So the facilitator will hear a proposal, and then put it to the gathering, you know, whether the, what enthusiasm for this proposal is there, and people will, you know, put their hand up if they're enthusiastic or not. And then one will ask for any objections to the proposal, and they need to be named. And then the job of the facilitator and the facilitator's assistant is to try and find a way that the objection can be put within the proposal. In other words, you're not rejecting it and going 'No, that's not what we're doing.'

Working with it.

You're trying to find a way to incorporate it. And if it becomes impossible, you know, over you give it a time limit, say an hour, if it becomes impossible to find the compromise, you'll just drop it and say 'Right, well, we'll leave this 'til the next meeting, and then come back to it again. If everybody could think about it in the meanwhile.' And that does seem to work. You know, I think it's some notion when you say no to somebody 'No, I'm absolutely not doing that ever.' There's a kind of, you know it's an immediate, but you can arrive at certain quite coherent decisions just by listening carefully. And then as I say, incorporating it - it might not be precisely the words that the objector had put down, but you might find a more, I don't know, moderate way of saying what they've said that will satisfy them, because it doesn't alter the meaning of what they've been saying. And then you can make that stick. And I learned a lot about that at Greenham - the importance of listening. And the importance of in listening, really hearing what's being said, and rather than taking the surface words, try and work out what's actually going on, what the objection really is, what the problem really is, because often there isn't one not really, etc, and so on.

What sort of issue - can you give me an idea of an issue that you felt that - it's a long time ago I know, but they worked towards a consensus within Greenham, that's a good example of this.

Well, I think, I'm just trying to think, er, I mean mostly, quite, a lot of it would be sort of trivialities, well, when I say trivialities, they'd be like the bank account or, you know, whatever - often about money. Money's surprisingly divisive in every organisation I've ever been involved in. Um, and so there'd be things like that - but I think mainly, it would be - something would start off quite angry - it might be that there was a huge fuss-ation, because it was believed that Caledonian Road, which was the building Ken Livingstone gave, gave Greenham to operate as a sort of London headquarters, was spending too much money. And after all, they weren't even here, you know, deprived in the mud. Um, and so we're going to be very angry. And then well, we'll kind of find a way to suggest, that you know, somebody from Caledonian Road came down and explained what they were up to, and so on and so forth. I mean just quite simple little ways that almost felt like people were determined to create an enemy when there wasn't necessarily one.

Very often through better communication?

Yes, yeah. Because often things go awry because people misunderstood a situation in some way or another.

Were you aware of any sort of political infiltration...

Oh yes.

...or sabotage?

Well, I know there was a woman journalist who I can't remember whether it was The Mail or The Express, one or the other - who certainly lived amongst us for quite some time before, I think gradually, I think somebody - it certainly wasn't me - picked up that she seemed a bit unlikely for some reason or another. And anyway, it turned out that she was indeed from one of the tabloids. And, you know, certainly there were times where - I mean it was impossible, obviously, because you can't vet everybody that comes in. You get a sort of sense, sitting around the fire, vaguely where somebody is at, but you can't

automatically just because they seem a bit um, ill informed about certain things assume that they're not for real.

So their role there was actually just to find out what was going on, and feed it to the outside world, rather than actually influence?

Um. Well, that bits hard to tell, because subsequent to Greenham, as you know, there've been various issues raised about infiltration. It has to been mentioned that Greenham was infiltrated in that way.

To what end?

Well, that's, that's what's difficult to ascertain, isn't it? Because I can't think of anything substantial that occurred. Well I, the only substantial thing I think that occurred was when this notion of zapping started. Did you - do either of you know about the zapping?

If you can just describe it. (Laughs).

(Laughs). I would describe the zapping as a very ordinary set of symptoms, like PMT. And it was claimed that this was a deliberate attempt on the part of the military. It was doing something to women, something negative, from a health point of view, to the extent that some women were in wheelchairs, or, you know, really, really ill. And were going public on this. And I said 'Well, I haven't been zapped.' And then the allegation was I wasn't important enough to be zapped!

So at what point was his zapping? And then the sort of discussion?

This was probably '85/'86, I would think.

Right. So what was his zapping?

Well, it was supposed to be some - I think it was - there had been, apparently, an allegation back in the early '80s by Britain, that the Soviets had been zapping the British Embassy in Moscow with some

explanation of microwave things or something. Get off Sonny, what you doing, go and play with your friends. They used some sort of, I don't know..

Sort of radioactive?

Yeah, some sort of laser or something. I don't know. I mean, I'm hopeless at that sort of thing, especially if I don't believe it! And so that was given its credibility. And then some woman from Green Gate appeared, or she went to Green Gate and Green Gate were full of it. And they came up to Yellow and explained their distress about it. And then several women said they hadn't been, and various women - more and more women were being zapped. And it did actually have a very negative effect on the camp. A lot of women left.

For fear of it?

Yes, as a result of the rather evident, apparently evident, difficulties women got into physically with it.

You talked about somebody being in a wheelchair, was that actually...

Well, she was in a wheelchair. So, I mean, what can you do? Get up and walk?

But she felt it was as a result of this zapping?

Yes. And when I asked about symptoms, they talk about headaches, and you know, but as I say, it all seemed like PMT to me. But anyway, on it went. And it, it did create a big disruption to the camp. And I mean, it was at a time when the camp was in difficulty anyway, because we already had the incursion by the Kings Cross women at that point.

Okay, we'll go to that in a minute, carry on.

And so it did appear to be you know, I'd say I hadn't been zapped, and the woman next to me would say she had. Can't make sense of this.

Yeah. You just mentioned the incursion of the Greenham, sorry, the King's Cross women.

I was only going to say one other thing. It's quite interesting, because it's more interesting than the other story - in about '88, probably, I was living in a squat in Hackney, and I had a call from Channel 4. I don't know if you remember a programme called After Dark?

Oh, yes, yes.

You remember After Dark? Well, anyway, it was a researcher from After Dark who said 'I understand that you don't believe in zapping?' I said 'No, I don't believe in zapping.' And she said 'Well, I wondered if you'd be interested in taking part in this programme we're arranging which, of which we've got a woman who says she was affected by zapping, we're hoping you who saying she wasn't, and we've also got somebody from the MOD who is going to claim that it was a, it was an experiment for - a psychological experiment on the part of the MOD.'

A psychological rather than a...

Yeah.

Right.

Yeah. So just if they planted this idea that there was this thing. And they had I mean, I don't know how much this Soviet thing had anything to do with it. But there was enough around that that made it sound credible.

Yeah.

So I said 'Yes, of-course, I'd be really interested.' And it was due to take place in a fortnight's time. Programme pulled, never heard of again. Nancy Banks-Smith, very famous television critic, wrote a huge article saying 'This is one of the best programmes on television. Why is it being pulled?' And nobody's ever from that day to this explained anything about it. And I've never had an opportunity to say anything about it. But I thought it was really, really interesting.

It's really interesting. Yes. It makes you start to wonder.

So that, that, yes, exactly. I mean, that kind of thing. When you say involved interference, I mean, that was a massive interference, if that's true. All I can tell you from my point of view what's true is that After Dark did ring me, that the programme was pulled, that Nancy Banks-Smith and co did write these letters, or these articles, complaining about the loss of the programme. And it's never surfaced since. I think there was one special on one occasion about something, that was on the After Dark format, because the idea it was open ended and all of that.

Yeah, how really interesting.

And of-course, I really wanted to meet this guy who was going to say it was an exercise in psychological warfare. So I thought that was amazing. Anyway.

Oh, shame. Shame on that. So yes, you just mentioned the King's Cross Women.

King's Cross Women - well the Kings Cross Women's Centre was quite well known at the time, in the '80s. And they came to Greenham, and accused Greenham of being racist, because of the lack of black women there. Which seemed to me at the time, and I said so, to be quite obvious, because black women were too busy fighting their cause in their own communities. Greenham was, admittedly, avowedly quite middle class in a way. By definition, you had to have a certain amount of time, or confidence or something to even approach it. So anyway, but

they had a very negative effect on the camp, because the split that they created never really healed itself. That was the beginning of a big, big split.

So that one half sort of went to the idea of the other half were being racist, or not?

Yeah. Well, it all then blurred into a whole lot of other issues. I mean, as you can imagine, it didn't stick on racism.

That was just the start?

That was just the start. And it never did get resolved. I mean, I tried - '89, I think, I went up there for 3 months with the sole intention of trying to resolve this impasse, because it seemed to me so ironic, that women had gone to Greenham for peace, and then ended up making war. And it was just impossible. By that time, women at Yellow, were refusing water to women at the other gates. I mean, it had got that ridiculous. And it certainly - the atmosphere there was appalling.

Different to when you had been there?

Oh, completely different, horrible.

So really sort of...

But both sides were so entrenched by then, I can remember going up to Blue, and seeing if I, I realised I wasn't getting anywhere with Yellow. So I thought, well, I'll go to Blue. And they were equally antagonistic towards the women at Yellow, who, you know, they couldn't, we used to always use Yellow for mail deliveries, because the mail would only deliver to one place, which I guess was fair enough. And they wouldn't accept mail for the other gates, and you know, just all got horrible. And I suppose it sort of blew, and books were written, and I haven't read, I must say, but there was, you know, the split became not just about racism, but ideological all over the place. And that to me, was the real

end of Greenham. And it's never been resolved to this day. I still think it's one of the difficulties trying to - I don't know what, how many women you've spoken to yet, and how many you will be speaking to. And I'm aware that some women who came later, are completely unaware of the background. I mean, it's never been, I never intended to write about it all. You know, I felt ashamed of it. I was really sad about it. I thought it was something that had been a sort of university to me had become a sort of horrible. It was a tragic end to it, really, because I think most of us just walked away from it in a way, just thought this is really so sad. We were building a community of women with, you know, possibly, too much idealism, though it didn't to me seem that idealistic. But um, to kind of end up in such a mess. One of the things I learned was, I mean, Occupy ended up in a mess over money. So I've come to the conclusion of what you oppose follows you about. I got the feeling if you oppose warfare, you go to war. If you oppose the money system, you get involved in money arguments. So it's how to, I mean, everything's a learning, isn't it? It's hard to get round these things.

What do you feel is the legacy of Greenham within the peace movement, um, feminism, whatever?

I think, I said to somebody I spoke to early on in this whole process, with you all, that I think one of the things I'm nervous about is the fact that I think Greenham women are seen as heroines. And I think you've even put that out in some of your... And I really think we were a bunch of ordinary women expressing the ideas of ordinary women, er, who weren't really heroines, who had a very interesting time within friendship groups, and shared experiences. And I don't think that's necessarily heroic. I think it was deemed to be heroic, because we were out in all weathers. But actually, it's really quite good for you. I mean, I like being out in all weathers, I quite miss it. I could I feel as if I could still - not particularly with this footling away, but, you know, I feel as though I could pick it up tomorrow. You know, it was a huge experience in my life. I feel like I could go down to Newbury, if my bender is still there, I could walk in and know exactly what to do, and how to keep warm, and how to do this, and how to that. It was a huge life experience and very

liberating in and of itself. I'm left much less frightened of life than I was before I went, even though I was a mother of four and five, I mean, not in ways that I even knew. But I kind of know how to do things. I know how to light fires, get water, I know how to sort of lift up a manhole cover...

That practical element.

Everything that we might need - I'm your woman, I can help you out!

Do you think it's got a legacy in feminism, or lesbianism, or any of those aspects?

I think possibly lesbianism, I think it's probably the first time that there was any notion that you know, women loving women looked like something.

Right. Yeah.

And in-fact, what it looked like was us wearing sort of by baggy clothes, and bobble-hats.

And that was the image?

Yes, it became, I mean, it was hugely influential on fashion. Leggings and everything else came about because of Greenham. I've still got the jacket that I wore at Greenham - a sort of barber jacket.

Can we get that out later, please?

Of-course!

How wonderful. How well do you think that the legacy has actually been relayed down through the generations?

Well, I think it's very difficult, because we've had quite an intimate conversation. I've let you in on some of the dirt of it all. And I can do a completely different riff altogether depending on what's going on. You know what I mean? I can make it all glorious. I mean, there's, there's stories I think should be told. I want to tell you this one because it's so beautiful, which is about the power of one person to change things. A woman came to the camp one day - I can't remember what day of the week it was. It doesn't really matter. She came from Wales, I think - she just sort of arrived one evening. We greeted her, made her a cup of tea and so on. And she had a little tent, and she put up her tent, and she didn't, she seemed quite shy and reticent. We tended not to push women, you know, just sort of let them be. And then she got up the next morning, had breakfast and then went back to her tent. I don't even remember what her name was. And then at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, I think we knew there was something going on in the base. It was, I don't think it was a convoy, but there was some sort of exercise or something, and I think she obviously knew that too. And she suddenly, just as the gates were opening, appeared from her tent wearing this most exquisite rainbow chiffon dress. I mean, it really was the most delicate - like gossamer. She looked like a fairy. And she came out of her tent, wearing this dress, and it was a, I don't, I can't remember what time of year it was. It certainly wasn't summer, but it was reasonably okay. It wasn't raining at least. And she came out, she looked absolutely gorgeous, she had long hair. And she just wafted in front of this lorry, and very gracefully sat herself down with her skirts all round her. She looked exquisite. The whole thing shuddered to a halt. And they were all mesmerised, the police were mesmerised, nobody seemed to know what to do. And then, and the traffic, I gather subsequently backed up to Newbury - good. And at some point, presumably the police were sort of radioing through, were told to do something. So one of the policemen went up to her and said 'You need to get up now.' And so she did, she just got up, bowed to the lorry, went back to her tent, took off her dress, came over to the fire about a half an hour later, and said 'I'm going now.' And that was that, she'd done what she came to do. And I think it was - that was to me, you know, one of the biggest, to me, those are the legacies of Greenham - those moments when

something like that happened. So magical. If you could just you know, it's like all those, all those images, but the images we see, you know, the guy with the woman with the flower in the gun. I think that was America. And then the guy in front of the tank, and these different individual images. Those are the powerful ones, and the ones to really be ready for.

Have you ever seen a picture that?

No. No. Because these days, of-course, I'd have got my phone out now, it would have been done. But those days, I mean, we didn't really, I mean, I've often thought that - what would it have been like with mobile phones, and so on and so forth. Solar batteries. I mean, we could of, but it would have completely changed everything.

So how well do you feel the legacy has actually been relayed down the generations?

Well, I think it has, but I think it's a bit hazy. I mean, I think it's the, I think they've got an idea of women living out - I think younger generation got an idea of women, those that have, camping outside in all weathers, and all of that. But I am amazed at the number of people who haven't got a clue what we're talking about. Never heard of it.

No. Is there any way in which you think that could have been, the legacy could have been, passed on better?

Well, I don't think it helps that the people who have tried to pass it on have made such a poor job of it. I went to a play in, I can't remember - was in Richmond, probably I can't remember. Somebody was supposed to be about Greenham, and supposed to be lots of Greenham women attending. And anyway, I went and I just - it was unbearably bad. Didn't even, I mean, I'd don't think it even had a fire element to it. And I thought, god, if I'd been doing this play, I'd have plonked a fire of some sort, you know, right in the middle of the stage, and that would have been my centre point. And it really missed the point all along the line,

and was nothing to do with nothing. So I went out, one of those embarrassing things, because of-course I'd been given a complimentary and all of that. So I find myself saying to the woman who'd invited me, you know, you know, I'm quite polite by nature. So I said 'I think you could have done a bit more research on this. It wasn't very accurate.' So she said 'Oh, I'm sorry about that.' But I went out to, you know, she bought me a drink and we went out to sit with the other Greenham women, none of whom were Greenham women.

Back to what you're saying earlier.

Yeah, they were either women who'd either been there once, or something, anyway. And I just despaired. And then I went to the Imperial War Museum, because there was something on there which said it was about Greenham. Did you go?

No.

(Laughs). It was pitiful. And I thought why don't they reach out and find, you know, there must be some mechanism by which they can reach out - through the press, The Guardian, or The Independent or something to ask for submissions. Because most of us have got this, that and the other, might even be willing to go and give a talk or something. But no, and it just becomes, you know, so, you know, and it's just anti-nuclear, women loved outside the base at Greenham Common between 1981 and 2000. Boom.

Yeah, one sentence.

Yeah. Whereas there are things. I mean, Sue McGregor did that reunion thing.

That's right, yeah. Yes. Yes.

And that was, that was interesting, because they had the Base Commander, and goodness knows who there. And clearly Greenham

women were much more effective than was admitted at the time, which of-course, we knew. They were horrified. Bunch of women, you know, getting into their base, etc.

Why do you think the Suffrage movement has had much more traction than the Greenham peace movement?

Well, I suppose because it's the origins of it all, in a way. Without Women's Suffrage, would Greenham have happened? It's hard to say, isn't it?

Yes.

And and I think, you know, helped by the fact that primary schools and so on, I mean, I know my grandson was making, you know, knew all about, he made this little thing which I took on - it's a little puppet that says 'Votes for Women', which I took on a procession thing for the Suffragette movement. And he came out of school bearing this saying 'Votes for women'. And he said 'Oh, Granny, I can't believe it.' He said 'You know that that, don't you?' I said 'Oh, yes, I do.' Because he knows my background. But anyway, I think it's - well, I think it's something, because we're still - I mean Trident's still in the offing, isn't it?

Yes.

Amazingly, in my view. Absolute waste of money. Let's spend it all on solar, or wind or something instead. I mean, how ridiculous. I mean, will there be an uproar about it? Who knows.

Yes. What were the particular challenges of having children in the camp? Were you a part of that? I mean, obviously, you had your own children, you chose not to have them long term there.

Well I don't think that would have been possible, especially them being boys, it was difficult enough for them to visit.

Right.

It was mentioned.

Really?

Again, you know.

Again, because it was boys?

Yeah.

How interesting.

And then the Greenham baby was a boy, which was helpful. (Laughs). That was very helpful! In-fact, there were a lot of boys, I mean, there was going around the fence and chatting to the soldiers and things. And I mean, one of the - I was given a dragon kite by somebody, some visitor who'd made this very lovely, sort of embroidered kite, and was flying this kite quite near the main gate. And somebody came out of the gate and told me we couldn't fly, because it would interrupt the aircraft. And he was really surprised, but obviously stopped. And then but he later divulged to me that he thought he meant the aircraft in America! So the children's perspective on what was going on, but it affected his whole architectural leanings, because he had - did a great long dissertation on borders and boundaries, and the importance of them, sort of wall-like thing. So, but obviously I mean, that's very personal. I think it's very difficult to see how it can be done without - I still think the best thing that's been done about Greenham is Beeban's film Carry Greenham Home. I mean, I thoroughly endorse that film. That really does describe everyday life at Greenham extremely well. I mean, you could almost just do that, and that's enough, you know what I mean? So she collared the market, really. I think a film was really helpful in that way, because she had hundreds of hours, I'd love to see the stuff she left out. Because we all went down to the Quaker Meeting House in Newbury to see it all. Because she wanted to know if anybody wanted

anything taken out, they could. And I can't remember how that was organised, that bit. But it was so good. It had all the elements, you know, all the kind of fun elements. That wonderful that with the main gate with the bolt, the bolt cutters. I mean, I've seen whole cinemas collapsed in laughter at that one. Of-course I was there at the time, we just couldn't believe that they were so stupid. When the gate goes over its triumphant! Just so stupid, they must have felt so stupid. I can't imagine what happened in the base that night.

(Laughs). How would you say that being a committed activist and campaigner has actually affected your personal life?

Oh, quite a lot.

I realised that I - sort of say what you want to say.

It affected my personal life to the extent I lost custody of my children, with Greenham being cited as the reason, that I'd abandoned them to live at Greenham. Even though as far as I was aware, I'd done so with my husband's support. And indeed, he'd written an article in the paper saying how much he supported me. However, that didn't cut any mustard. And when I, when I first was served with the papers, I went to see a solicitor who said 'Well, nothing will happen. Because they're bound to have social work reports. They can't just take your children away.' But they did. It was done as an emergency hearing in the magistrate's court.

Who actually...

In Wells. My husband initiated it, with support of his solicitor.

And was it the fact that you were a Greenham woman?

Yeah.

Or that you feel the decision went against you.

I know it was that.

It was literally your label.

Well, I've found, I found out anyway, subsequently, so anyway, with no social work reports, it was then there and then custody and control to him, with reasonable access to me. Well reasonable access didn't take place for 2 years. I was in and out of court for 2 years to try and get to see them. Meanwhile, my parents had taken on the two older ones without my permission. So, and I pointed that out to the court that because I'd been married twice, two of my children, were by my first husband, and I had sole custody of them. And therefore, they would automatically become part of this custody order given I had nowhere to live. And so on. But they didn't take any notice of that. There wasn't a social work report. Greenham was cited. And years - well, not that long afterwards, 4 or 5 years afterwards, in the squat I was living in in Hackney, next door, lived a barrister and his wife, who is also a barrister. And he did a bit - he was very shocked, because the story, I told him this story. And he did a bit of investigation. And he said 'It's, it was really talked about at the time, it was seen as a completely political decision to - for you to lose custody of those children.' And it was quite effective. That was in, around the time of the ten million women. And it was a huge exodus from the camp, women got really scared that they would lose custody of their children due to their presence at Greenham. I mean, it was more effective than zapping or any of the other methods that might have been used to try, that was terrifying.

Sorry. So you said the ten million, ten million women, or your particular.... your particular case? Sorry.

No, it was just around that time. And I can remember around that time the camp was in deep trouble with numbers dwindling, including visiting numbers. And all the information we could get hold off was women were really frightened by this judgment.

For yourself?

For me having lost the children. Because of-course it's Lysistrata, isn't it? It's a big punishment, and it was done.

And this barrister was very aware of this particular judgement?

When he explored it a bit, and went into some detail, because obviously I could tell him the court it had taken place in, and and so on and so forth. He said 'Oh, you know, there was quite a kerfuffle about it at the time. That this has been' - but I couldn't, you know, I mean, I had no grounds to fight anyway, I was in a really, the whole thing was diabolical because I - also, the fact was, he was the father of my children, and I did love him, and blah, blah, and all of that. And so fighting him in court, I could - innumerable things I could have not exactly invented, but kind of exaggerated in order to make him out to be the baddie. But I, all of me said two wrongs don't make a right. I'm not going to do that. Which I've questioned over the years. But hey, what can you, you know. But that's what I decided. And I still feel it was the right thing to do. Because I didn't want, I didn't, just didn't want the boys to have a conflict with their father. So the conflicts become inevitable with one of the boys who just, I don't know - none of them have ever really talked about it properly. And they've never talked to him about it. I have seen him subsequently. I mean, last time was at my youngest son's wedding, where we ended up having breakfast together with him and his new wife - well not new, it's ridiculous to say new, she's about 15 years of wifedom. In this rather ridiculous place we were in for my son's wedding. And I remember thinking this is very bizarre. Having this weird polite conversation, as we British do. But I just never wanted the boys to feel, I mean, I wanted them to feel that I had loved their father. I wasn't going to suddenly turn into the you know, his archenemy, because it wouldn't have been true. I mean, it was a kind of truth, but not the truth. So my parents didn't speak to me for 10 years so it was quite...

But they had got custody of the two older ones - your parents?

Oh, they hadn't got custody.

They'd taken..

They'd kidnapped them. As far as I'm concerned.

Yes. Sorry, what was I going to say? Um. Yes. In terms of getting back access to your children, was there any support from any sort of Greenham movement?

No. I can't say Greenham was very supportive either, because they thought I should fight to get them back. I suppose partly because Greenham had been besmirched by it. But I said 'I can't fight to get them back. Because fighting will imply I've got to make him the baddie. He's made me the baddie, I'm going to have to make him the baddie. And yes, I feel at the moment he's the baddest person on earth. But that's not the point. Point is I didn't think that until this happened. So I can't do it'. And didn't.

It's, really interesting, yes. How do you think you were portrayed by the media and elsewhere? And were there sort of better or worse sort of media channels?

Yes. Funnily enough. There kind of were. I mean, obviously The Guardian, I say obviously, but The Guardian was supportive, and Paul Brown in-particular. But the most interesting character, from my point of view - I was very unpopular for thinking this - was Charles Moore, whose subsequently became editor of The Daily Telegraph. He used to turn up on his motorbike, in his black leathers. And he wrote excellent articles about Greenham, and they were the most accurate ones of all, I thought. And he was interesting character. So you know, we have to be careful what we're prejudiced about, because...

Who was he writing for at that stage?

Telegraph.

He was actually writing for The Telegraph at that point?

So none of the other women would speak to him. But I got on with him quite well. And he did write really excellent articles.

Quite objective?

Objective and, and accurate. He described the women very well, very, honestly. With no, I mean, obviously, it wasn't all positive, but negatives that there were were entirely true. So...

Where did the, okay so you got that sort of objective view, where do you feel that, or how do you feel you were portrayed inaccurately?

Well, mostly in the tabloids, and mostly this sort of, I mean, it wasn't really about anything. It was just 'Lesbian, lesbian, lesbian, filthy lesbians'. End of. There wasn't really anything else to be said about it. That was all they had to say. Because that was the stick they could beat us by. I mean, they wouldn't be able to get away with it to that extent now, but they could then, obviously.

Interesting. When you look back, how did you, how did you feel about the camp, once you had sort of got out of it?

Um. Well, it was such a difficult time because the conflict was so high, it was almost a relief to be out of that...

With the Kings Cross?

Yeah, out of that atmosphere. And I'd learned so much from it that I was just sort of wanting to move on - Carry Greenham Home, really. So subsequently, I started, you know, really working on ways in which what I'd learned at Greenham I could use in the world. So I experimented. And my main sort of job, as it were, is as a multimedia artist. So I was finding ways to work with the community in multimedia art projects, that

could run on a donations basis, because I'd already come to a very strong view about money. And build up, and ultimately, that led to, for 10 years, I ran a project in Glastonbury, the Phoenix Project, which was immensely successful - all run on donations, in a building. And it was, yeah, it was really magical. We did lots of stuff, from opera, to painting, to films, to making films. It was just a very big community resource - to having parties. Just did all sorts of things - and all on donations, which everybody said wasn't possible.

And what you produced there stayed within Glastonbury, or did you manage to...

No, it stayed within Glastonbury, except that we did always have a slot at the festival. So it went to the world in that way. I mean, my last sort of enterprise before I stopped to come up here to look after my grandson, was the Glastonbury novel, where I had five portable typewriters, you know, old fashioned typewriters. And it was based on the Surrealist idea of writing five lines each, and one person following on from another, to write this novel. And so, and then all the pages were put in order. And I've got the Glastonbury novel, and it's really quite good.

Have you really? Can we have a look later? Can I just ask you...

Got to try and remember where it is!

Okay. Can I just ask you, I would like to ask you sort of is there a moment, or emotion, or a picture that to you sums up Greenham? Now you have mentioned this wonderful vision of the power of one - the lady.

Yeah, yeah.

Is there anything else that's even more powerful to you?

No, I don't think so. I mean, no, not that I - it's an interesting question. Um. Not as I can think of, I mean, it becomes, in the end, it becomes the

Embrace the Base fence, really - with all those all those items on them, you know all the blankets and baby clothes and all of that. I think that really, I think that was the bit at which Greenham was, I think interestingly enough, that action, the Embrace the Base action was probably, you know, the most powerful thing that Greenham did in some ways, because it was so unexpected. And it was so successful. And, you know, I think the powers that be were kind of like, oh, what's happening? How did they manage to get thirty thousand women? In the days where there wasn't Facebook or anything. It was just done by word of mouth, very quickly. Very quickly, comparatively. And it happened. So it was just one of those moments in time, wasn't it? There was a kind of, so I think that would be - Embrace the Base would be my image.

Your image. Yes. And finally, could you just explain why you think it's important that Greenham is remembered by future generations?

Well, for just that reason - that when large numbers of people get together to say something, if they say it with a clear enough voice, something positive will happen. That's it really, I think.

Yes.