

Maggie Parks

So yes, so um, I know a tiny bit about you from the introductory emails.

Right.

Tiny little bit of an introduction, and obviously I've done a little bit of background on the centre.

Oh right, okay.

And um, so, I mean, from a starting point, I, from what I've heard you lived at Greenham, is that correct?

Yes.

Yes. So I guess you didn't move straight in from wherever you were living at the time? So what was the route?

My journey?

Yeah (chuckles).

It's interesting, isn't it? I think this morning when I was coming into the car, I thought, how honest am I going to be? And then I thought, well, I guess I need to just yeah, just be as open and honest about that journey as possible. I suppose it's really interesting because I think my background and I think Voz probably has said the same thing to you of growing up working class and poor. So I was born in 1952 in the slums of Jarrow, my granddad was on the Jarrow hunger march.

Oh, right.

And um...

Up in the northeast?

Up in the northeast, and um my grandmother was very politically active in getting one of the first women MPs in the northeast into parliament. So I sort of come from, from very poor beginnings, but also a sort of politically active background. So it's really interesting, although my parents were in no way political whatsoever. And then, of course, I grew, we moved from the northeast and we moved to Malvern, which is very posh. And I ended up being a working class kid on a council estate going to a very posh grammar school, which was again, very informative about privilege, privilege and injustice and all of that sort of stuff. So I think from a very early age, I just had this massive sense of social injustice. And I grew up with two sisters. So it was interesting that my home life was very female orientated. I was in an all girls' school, and um, loved being around women. So and then, of course, had my teenage years I was 16 in 1968 when the big social revolution was going on. So I was a hippie chick walking around um, with no shoes on. And then, and so I worked for the probation service. I did community work work for the probation services in my late teens and early 20s. And again, had this very strong sense of social justice, and understood privilege and politics, I think I called myself a socialist when I was 14, but was never really, I don't know, I was never really part of anything. So although I was political, I never joined a party. I never really got involved in anything. And so my journey into Greenham was was really quite interesting. I'd been to a women's consciousness raising group in my early 20s, at one of our local communes, and um, hadn't - it hadn't caught me. It was really interesting - hadn't caught me, I thought, because I by then was very self sufficient. I was in my early 20s and I was working, and I'd got my own flat and I you know, I was a bit into sex drugs and rock and roll you know, I was having quite a good time and and I remember coming out of that meeting and thinking all these middle class women, they seem to be moaning about men, but actually, I think they're just moaning about their own man. And, and so I didn't, I didn't quite get it in a way, it was it was interesting, although I really understood, you know, social injustice. I didn't quite get feminism, not in a real way. And um, so it was interesting. And it wasn't until, so I was 30

when I went to Greenham and I, actually it was a massive turning point in my life, and I still to this day, and I'm 66, I still see my life as before Greenham, and after Greenham.

So it was pivotal?

Massive, it was the most life changing thing that happened to me, and I think because it coincided with actually the ending of a long term relationship. Um, with a man, when I, in the end of my 20s we'd been together 7/8 years, and the death of my very beloved father at the age of 58. So I see it, it's really interesting, as sort of coincidental with losing men out of my life.

Hmm.

So the two sort of biggest influences that had been in my life and so it was a very interesting journey. I'd been living in Ibiza for a year, and I came back in October 1982. Um, and my father died at the end of that October. So, my going to Greenham was, so, so before and after, was also to do with with trauma, the death of, the very early death of my father. So, but they're so inextricably linked for me, I can't, I can't divide them, Elaine, it's very interesting. And so I'd come back to this country and and I, you know, came back to my hometown and met up with friends and I'd always been interested in the anti-nuclear stuff. There'd been a lot going on in the sort of late '70s, early '80s. And um, I'd been and seen, you know, all the war game films and stuff like that. And so I came back and I'd only obviously been home for a couple of months, and people started asking me if I was going to go to Embrace the Base, which was December 1982. And I said, 'Oh, I don't know what it's about'. But I sort of remember being in a pub, an old Irish pub, my dad was Irish, and I can almost, I kept hearing Greenham, it was like on the wind and everywhere I went there was Greenham, and somebody said 'Oh, there's a coach going down from Worcester, are you're going to go?' and I'm a bit of a commitment-phobe so I said, I don't know I'd never bought a ticket. But on the the day before the Embrace, I decided to get in my car and drive there. So I was, I hadn't got a clue really what

I was going into it was, it was extraordinary. And so I drove down there with a sleeping bag in the back of my car. I mean, I've never been to Newbury, I'd never been to the base didn't know but I parked my car somewhere. And there were just thousands of women I caught, I couldn't believe it, really. And um, I was walking down the road. I thought, where am I going to go? Where am I going to be? How am I going to do this? Where am I going to sleep? And I was walking down the road, and I saw this figure coming towards me, and it was a woman called Carol who lived in my hometown who I didn't know particularly well. But I said, she said 'What are you doing here?!' And we had literally both arrived independently in our cars. So it was suddenly like I had someone to be with. And you if you're going to take part in the action, they wanted you to go and register. So around the base, there were these different tents where you could go and sign up because obviously they wanted to keep track of everybody. And they wanted to completely blockade the base. So Carol and I headed for the tent. And, um is this sort of stuff you want?

Um-hum. (Agrees)

Yeah. Headed for the tent, and it was very organized. There were women with walkie talkies, there were tables all set up, and the registration forms, and all sorts of things. Carol and I were in a queue to register, and we suddenly heard some women just a little bit ahead of us in the queue talking. And it turned out that they were from Worcester, which is like, eight miles.

Yeah. Yeah.

Which was, again, extraordinary. So I think there are about four or five of them. So we met up with them. And suddenly we just had what, what a Greenham are called affinity groups, because um, you had to, you know, you had to be in a group, you couldn't just go off on your own and do actions, and um, there was training, safety warnings, stuff like that. So immediately, I had this little gang, um, which was sort of, sort of bit serendipitous, really, and very exciting. And I think we had a bit, I

can't remember, I think we had a bit of training, but we were sent off to this little gate somewhere on the base that we were meant to blockade. And um, we couldn't find it. It was it was very weird, we couldn't find it. And so we all hung out together. And I think we slept in a tent on the ground somewhere. I can't remember all of that. And then on the morning of I think, I don't know, I think it was, I thought I'd never forget the date, I think it was December the 2nd or December the 8th. Um, we all went off and I think I don't know what part of the, the base we were around. I can't remember where it was. I think it was somewhere near Orange Gate - I came to learn later. And just hung out all day, and met women and talked and there was just this immense, and it was exciting and amazing, and then there were women walking around with walkie talkies. And then I remember us actually getting the call that we had actually all joined up. And we were all holding hands.

That's the encirclement?

That's the encirclement, I think was called Embrace the Base. And, you know, I think it was one of the most thrilling things I'd ever encountered. And, you know, in a very sort of magical way, it was this huge energy circle of women. And I think it was that moment of that energy circling 30,000 women that was so life changing for many of us, even though we had no sort of conscious knowledge of it. I think something extremely amazing and magical, and for me spiritual, I think, happened - although I didn't know it at the time. And I think it was, it was really interesting because as I said, I lost my father, which had been the first death - I was 30 and I hadn't lost anybody close. And I think it was interesting that my sort of feminist path, and my spiritual path coincided with those events, really, because I'd had some very interesting things happen to me. I don't know whether this is really relevant to this story, but it's my story. I'd had some really odd coincidences and magic things all happen to me around the death of my father. And, and I just think I was very open. I was very, you know, on lots of sort of levels. I think I was sort of like, my psyche was very open. I think in some ways, you know, the death of my dad was such a traumatic event I was a bit shattered really. So it felt like, I don't know, it felt like a gift from him.

Which is really odd, because the next years were all about challenging patriarchy. And my dad was a real Irish patriarch, in a way. So it was interesting, but it did feel when I looked back retrospectively, of course, at the time you, you don't see all of the connections. But everything for me around Greenham was about connections, and us making connections, and weaving this amazing web of interconnectedness. And it's no coincidences that you know that we had loads of webs all over the fence, and that the web became a very magical um, symbol for us, and you probably can't see but behind that there's actually a big...

Yes I can see it.

There's a big created web, and um I'll show you at some point, we did at our AGM, and interestingly enough, nationally, Rape Crisis England and Wales have called their new digital project, and linking women through digital media and web. There's the web. They've called it Weaving the Web. So it's interesting how that symbol has sort of, you know, carried on through after 30, how many 36 years?

Um, more?

Well, certainly for me, it was '82, yeah. So yeah 36 years in December.

And the webs were woven onto the fence?

Yeah, lots of, lots of weaving of webs onto the fence. You know, that idea of a web that if something happens over here it actually affects what's going on over here.

Yes, the vibrations.

The vibrations. So um...

Quite a strange concept from the people inside that fence, I wonder?

Oh, I think there were lots of strange concepts for those people inside the fence. So I went to the Embrace. And then it was like, I don't know, I've never taken heroin, but it was - my senses, it's probably like your first shot of heroin. It's sort of like, blissed me out. And I just thought, oh, I want more of this. So we stayed. A couple of us stayed from our little affinity group the next day, and um blockade, and then we did a blockade I think the next day so we had the Embrace, and I think it was the next day we tried to blockade all the gates, or I think it was our first time that we tried to blockade all the gates, and again, I just - oh my god, you know again really interesting because I think I had tried to be my daddy's good girl, even though I was a bit of a crazy hippie chick but you know, I'd always wanted to please my dad. And I think I was a little bit in awe of authority and all of that. So I'm sure it wasn't on that first blockade, but I know on future blockades that I was on - I was on many of them - looking up into the face of a police officer who was telling you to move and saying no, was one of the most liberating things I'd ever done, um, you know, to actually be confronted by that real authority figure and say no, was quite incredible. So that was my journey to Greenham. Do you want me to just keep talking?

Yes, yes, as long as it's flowing, I have prompts if you dry out.

Okay, oh, I could probably talk all day. But, um, so, um, so two things happened. One was I couldn't stay away. So I kept driving - so my mum had just been recently widowed, and I was living back at home, so and I didn't want to leave her a lot. So initially, I would just get my car and go down for weekends. And the other thing was that we started a group called Worcester Women for Peace. So the group that we've been together - so we started um, locally building um, women's groups in our own in our own area, but I was also going down - because the singing got in my soul. Songs like 'You Can't Kill the Spirit' were just like, you know, they got into sort of every atom of my being, I think. And I think it was the first time because I hadn't - I threw religion out probably when I was about 14, at the same time I declared I was a socialist. So I've never had any sense of deep community - I've never had, you know, never had a religion and I think a lot of people get involved in religion for

that sense of belonging to something. So it never really had always been a, you know, like lots of people say they, you know, they were been outsiders and never thought they belonged. But I got this whole sense of purpose and belonging to something that was bigger than me. And bigger than my own ideas, and I'd always wanted to change the world, I think. I think always somewhere in me. I wanted to make a difference in the world but didn't know how, or how I could. And for the first time, I just felt, oh my god, we can change things we can make a difference. And um, our Worcester Women for Peace group met at Quaker meeting house, in Worcester, and some of the Quaker women got involved and I became really close friends with a woman who was in her 80s. And um, she used to come - when I went up and down to Greenham, she'd sometimes come with me, and there was something amazing about that whole intergenerational thing that went on as well. You know, um, so it felt like women from all walks of life came there. And I know again, retrospectively, that you know, it didn't have a great deal of diversity when it came to race, and there was massive criticism of it. Because of that, you know, it was seen as a white middle class movement, but actually, I was very much a working class kid, you know, and there were lots of working class women who did go there. And, you know, and it also became a place of refuge, I think for a lot of women who'd got mental health issues, women who were homeless - which could cause problems at times, but actually it it was incredibly inclusive in that way.

What sort of problems?

Oh, there was rows, there were lots of rows at Greenham. So people didn't, people didn't always get to see the rows. There were money rows, we would have money meetings and there were lots of rows about money. And of course, as it started to really the media and the camp started growing up at every gate, you know, there was a lot of stuff brought to that camp. You know, people like Linda McCartney came and you know brought Harrods' food baskets and donated. So you know that it, so, so while there was amazing stuff going on, there were also some issues - and of course later on we also knew that we'd been

infiltrated by you know, undercover, you know, cops. I mean, there were, you know, and I think, you know, the Guardian have been doing quite a few articles recently about all, you know, all the undercover police officers that have had relationships with women. And, um, you know, the, they put out whole lists of where, because there's been inquiry and there were definitely undercover people there at Greenham, and so there was some distrust going, and that was, you know, so, so like any community, you know, it wasn't, you know, it wasn't an ideal utopia. It was, you know that first winter I went there, you know, in the January. Now I lived there for weeks and weeks at a time. And that's that winter, that first winter I lived there quite a lot of the time and it was cold and it was hard, um, you know, gathering wood and but it was, it was also pretty amazing. Um, so, yes, so there were lots of so it was hard, but it was inspirational and it was, you know, I really do believe it was a sort of like an open university for women. I remember sitting around some of the fires and just hearing ideas and concepts that I'd never heard before. I mean, it just completely opened me up to so many things. And I started off at what that first was called Main Gate and then turned into Yellow Gate, because then all the gates got colours.

Yeah.

And I spent a lot of my time at Green Gate then, which was in the woods. And it's sort of seen as the, the fluffy gate, really the sort of spiritual gate, it was right in the middle of the woods, and it became a bit witchy. And so um, that was where I spent a lot of my time. And it was, as I say, it was just this amazing thing where women from all over came together. And then it became international, you know, and I made a number of making friends with an amazing woman called Zol de Hyster, who was doing some amazing work about, um, you know, the nuclear bombing in the South Pacific and what was happening to people over there. So it became not just a sort of - it was an international movement. And we were starting to make connections with women all over the world, and women were coming from America and Australia. And um, yeah, so it was, yeah, it was just quite incredible, really. And um, so I'm trying to think, I suppose, for the next. So that was '83-'84 -

those two years, I probably spent not maybe quite as much as 50% of my time, but certainly I would say 30/35% of my time there and being involved in actions. And yeah, and being involved in, in other - so, so that was that happening at Greenham, but then, you know we did a big, I think, was the second action called Carry Greenham Home, and we did a big again, I remember - I can't remember the name of the singer who sang the song 'Carry Greenham Home', and we made a big dragon and we carried the dragon all the way around the base. And um, so there was the idea that we would carry Greenham home, so that it wasn't just what was going on on the base, but what we were doing locally. So our so we then moved from, from Worcester Women for Peace was still going, but then in Malvern, which was my hometown, we set up what was called a Woman for Life on Earth group. And we had another group of women there. And that was really quite a large group. No, we must have had about - I say large, 30/40 women for a small town, and we did quite a lot of actions - there we closed roads. I remember getting a huge great big globe - I don't know where we we rented it from, and pushing it up the road, up the roads that would be closed if cruise missiles were on. We had lots of awareness. We did loads of workshops, we showed lots of films, we put on - and then the miners' strike happened, and we had all the miners' wives come, and they were involved. And we were putting on a concert in aid of the miners' wives. So there was this massive sort of political ferment going on, not just at Greenham, but you know, everywhere. And I know, I obviously I wasn't here in Cornwall, but you know, I've heard that women, you know, had the camps here and there were groups down here, and there were groups everywhere. I remember going to peace conference in Nottingham. Um, so there were women centres, there was, you know, there was just so much political activity for women. And yeah it was just absolutely life changing really. And I was living on benefits because those were the days when you could, and being very politically active - thank you very much, living on benefits. And that was the first time I hadn't worked - because I'd worked from when I was about 13. So that was a liberation in itself, actually. So it was really interesting. So um, what else happened to me in those years? And what happened to Greenham women? So I got pregnant in February 1985. And that was

a bit life changing for me. Um, my partner Phil, who I'm still with after 36 years. We weren't living together. And we didn't live together until we moved to Cornwall and our little boy was six. But um yeah. So I got pregnant and that that sort of changed things for me really because I didn't want to be putting my body on the line, although I do remember we in Malvern we had a big base. It was called RSRE - the Royal Radar Establishment, which was a big, quite a big military base that had quite a big military presence. So we used to do lots of actions there. And I do remember being about five months pregnant and being on a, some sort of blockade at the gates and somebody trying to manhandle me and I thought, no, I'm not, I can't do this anymore. I just really can't. But also what happened in those, those years before I got pregnant - apart from everything I'd ever thought or believed was turned upside down and inside out really - and understanding patriarchy and understanding what patriarchy did, and still continues to do, and understanding the power and control it had. And I think I'd always understood power and the misuse of power in, you know, social and economic ways, political ways, but I hadn't quite understood um, that it was also in spiritual ways, and that as women, our you know, our spirituality had been corralled as well as our creativity. And so it was interesting, so so in those years, I met lots of amazing women and I met a lot of amazing women artists, and I came, became very close friends with a woman called Monica Sjoo, who wrote, had written a book called The Great Cosmic Mother Of All, but she's amazing artist. And um, and, you know, her work is she was Swedish woman and her work - her books are taught in universities now, but her paintings are iconic. And she, she painted an iconic image called God Giving Birth, which is - look it up if you've never seen it, Google it, and it's a black woman standing out in the universe, you know, with a baby's head coming out from between her legs.

And it challenged established ideas?

It really did challenge establish ideas that God was not some white male who was out there. And so, you know, so I got into, you know, women's spirit and women's magic in quite a big way. And, you know, we had, you know, yeah, so there was a lot, there was quite a lot of magic going

on at Greenham really, which was very interesting. And I think a lot of us, and I started getting interested in women's history, you know, and realising that, you know, history didn't start 2000 years ago, it, you know, started thousands and thousands of years ago and that women had been seen as the creators of life until, you know, the patriarchy came. And um, so, yeah, so. So, some really, really profound things. And um just meeting some of the, I think, some of the most amazing women in the world that massively influence me, and influence my thinking. And um so, you know, so when I had Jem I had a, you know, although I was older, I had a home birth and it was very magical, and I decided I was going to home educate him. I didn't want to put him into the hands of the patriarchy, and he's um, he's 33 now and working for the man in the City of London, but he's a wonderful feminist.

Talking of feminists, I mean, you talk about the magical, spiritual side of the women at Greenham.

Yeah.

Which which clearly did touch you profoundly. Um, although it was really your father's death that kind of almost provided the space for you to flow into, and I'm wondering about how it felt when the other female influences - particularly the more extreme hardline feminists, particularly from America, who were against penetrative sex, and anti men - how did you find coming into contact with them?

Well, it's really interesting because I don't think that's really changed in the women's movement in some ways. You know, I've been in the women's movement since then. And as you can see, I'm a chief executive for women's center now. So, you know, for me, feminism is about inclusivity. And it's about you know, that whole idea of different there for equal. And so I suppose I probably was in fairyland! So I don't know. So I had relationships with women when I was Greenham, which was sort of a first for me, and I suppose, made me understand my own bisexuality, although I've been in the you know, long term monogamous, monogamous relationship for 36 years now, but, you

know, what did I think? I just thought that that was those women's choices and I didn't, I suppose for me, the whole thing about Greenham was about this amazing mesh of ideas, and I never felt any pressure from anybody at Greenham - and maybe it's about my personality - to be anything other than I wanted to be. I didn't feel like I had to challenge another woman's way of living and I, you know, a lot of my friends made political choices to become lesbians. And that was a very interesting idea. And one that I completely understood and empathised with, you know, so I didn't, so I, I completely got that and I didn't I suppose I, honestly, Elaine, I don't know that I saw that as hardline.

Okay.

I just saw that as choices that women make. And I think that's how I feel now. And I think one of the reasons we're really successful women's centre is that we have an inclusivity around that as well. So I think, so I didn't - it's interesting, isn't it? Yeah. So that isn't how I, I perceive that.

Okay. You said that you were with the Green Gate, in the woods, did you? Because that sounds kind of almost womb-like and I was wondering whether you actually got to interact with women from other gates?

Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah, we did all of that. Yes, of course. I think it was interesting how the gates developed over the years. You know, like, I think it was Blue Gate - that was where was all the young punky, you young women hung out there, and I was past being young and punky, but I think we all came together, and we would all go around and visit each other's gates, and I remember us you know, putting things on a Green Gate and women from other gates would come - so I don't think we became sort of like exclusive territories, and actually I think I've got - a fact the time I got most hurt was actually when we blockaded um Green Gate. And I remember you know, a copper coming and literally lifting me up and throwing me, and I've actually got a photograph on Peace News - which I've been trying to quickly get up in the loft and find

of me on a blockade there. So we still blockaded together and we still so so it was quite womb like, it was just that each gate had sort of different energies, I think. But you know, there were there was lots of, other lots of discussions and lots of arguments, you know, when everybody you know, took against calling Yellow Gate, Main Gate and all of that. So, um...

So what would - if there was such a thing - what was an average day like?

Oh, getting up late (laughs), maybe? No, I don't know what's late? 9 o'clock / 10 o'clock, having cups of tea sitting, around. Um, visitors coming, talking to visitors going off 'wooding', getting lots of wood for the fire, going off into the woods going and getting water. Um, sometimes going to the shop, sometimes going into the swimming pool to take a shower.

How did the locals respond to you when you interacted like that?

Well it was it was different in it changed over the years. So at the beginning, lots of locals were very helpful. And there were local women who let you use their houses for showers and those sorts of things. Later on it got, it, I don't know it because I think, I don't know. I remember going into the pubs, local pubs and stuff. It it got more difficult. And I remember with the local oh, it wasn't a McDonald's. What's that chain of stuff that's - I still have some now.

Wimpy?

Not Wimpy. Oh, it's one of those travellers' rest places.

Oh, Little Chef?

Little Chef - Little Chef banned women from going in there - going and sitting and have a cup of tea, and just sit. So it's, yeah, so you know and at night people would come and drum around the fire, and we'd sing,

and we'd drum, and we'd dance, and we'd read books and someone might read poetry to each other. And um, so it was just a I don't know - the days all melded, it was just amazing. I'd never lived out in nature before. So, you know, that was the most incredible thing to be, you know, and that was part of, you know, I think, the spiritual awareness, there was your real interconnectedness with nature, you know, literally living collectively, um, you know, together on the land, and of course, our periods started to sink and we got into moon magic and all of that stuff. So celebrated the moons and, you know, did body painting. I mean, just crazy. You know, it was a really creative and intellectual ferment, um so it, yeah, it was just incredible. And then, as I say, I just think around all of that, in local towns, there was a lot of creativity, and we got - our group got involved in - so there's a Women for Life on Earth magazine, and our group got involved in editing a couple of issues of that. Then the meantime I'd met a woman called Vron McIntyre in Nottingham, I think I'd gone up to a peace conference - a women's peace conference in Nottingham, and I met this amazing woman in a women's spirituality workshop called Vron and we became very close friends. And that must have been about 1985 because I think I was just pregnant when I met Vron, and she came to live in Malvern. And then we started organising conferences in Malvern. So we had a women's peace conference. We had an angry women's conference, which Clare Short came to, we had an challenging new age patriarchy conference. So doing lots of things and out, of so as, as the sort of '80s wore on, and I had a little one and I didn't really want to take him down there, I withdrew more and more and more from Greenham. I still think I went down for a couple of big actions, but my life changed, although it still stayed incredibly women focused. And two things happened. One was we had a Women for Life on Earth meeting in about 1987 at my flat - can I remember, there was 17 women in that room. And we suddenly started talking about childhood sexual abuse. And out of those 17 women, 12 women had either experienced childhood sexual abuse, rape or domestic violence. And it was out of that group that Women for Life on Earth group, that we started Worcester Rape Crisis Centre. So that was my move into working around violence against women. And, you know, that was up, for me that was directly influenced by everything I'd learned at

Greenham, and about all the power structures, you know, that that violence against women is a cause and a consequence, you know, of inequality. And um so that was so that was interesting. So I then started getting involved in setting up a Rape Crisis Centre in Worcester, which, you know, ended up being a part time coordinator of later on. But also Vron I also started a women's writing magazine. I brought a few copies in called From the Flames. And we had been very interested - there was a women's writing journal called Woman Spirit, that two women in America - on the west coast of America had edited for 10 years. And in 1989, they'd done a 10 year cycle, and they decided to stop and we said, oh, we're gonna miss it so much, and Vron said 'Why don't we start our own?' And so, again, out of Greenham, so we started From the Flames, which was a women's writing journal, and so we had lots of, so again, all based, and I can... so a lot of it was based... so...so as you can see like lots of poetry book reviews. So really women were really beginning to understand that how important myth and symbol was to them and how all our myths have been turned against us, and how all our symbols have been appropriated by the patriarchy and we started...So this was the days before computers really...

Well yes, which is which is quite amazing - 'Happy 10th Birthday Greenham common women's peace camp'.

Yeah.

10 years, 100 days 1000 women. I mean, it sounds as if the, I mean, from talking to women, it's been very interesting to hear to what extent, for instance, they were part of a group first, and then went to Greenham, and it sounds as if you went to Greenham first..

Yes.

...and from out of that came this - the birth of all these groups - so the energy was incredibly powerful to be able to do that.

Incredible.

But these energies were operating on so many different levels. So as you talk about women's periods began to synchronise, I mean, that's energy acting at a primitive level...

Absolutely.

Right the way through to an intellectual level, and that you're in - it sounds as if where you were really attuned to it, was on the more primitive to spiritual, mystical level.

But also intellectual, because I actually I read more than I'd ever read in my life, and read academic books that I had never - so I read books on anthropology I read, you know, I read books like Gynecology by Mary Daly I, I've read quite academic books and you know, one of the things Vron and I were very clear about was that actually as women we needed to - while we were doing all of this stuff, we really needed to value our intellects as women as well and not, not let that go - that that was really important, our our political and intellectual understanding of what had been done to us - you know, and that they'd burnt millions of us as witches, you know, you know, the uncovering of women's her-story was really important to really understand the mythologies that had been turned against us, and you know, to rediscover our symbols. So, so for me it was it was a real melding of mind, body, spirit, that it was, you know, for, you know that so the excitement for me was about finding community. It was about finding, like-minded women, but it was also, you know, this massive excitement of ideas and intellectual philosophies, you know, because I think, you know, feminism is so exciting because it is ever changing. You know, it is moving, you know, we called it the women's movement, but actually, it's women's movement. And it's been fascinating being in feminism for so long and seeing so many changes. So for me, there was this going on, which was our spirituality, our politics, our lives, and it was interesting how it changed. So this changed from being a quarterly journal - Radical Feminist Spirituality Magic and the Goddess, and I think later on, we

called it Radical Feminism with Spirit, because we felt that it all started. So there was a very interesting change that happened.

Yes.

I think is that when Thatcher said there was no such thing as society, it was really interesting. Because what what we found happened, as we went through the years of being profoundly political, that this - this spirituality wasn't separate from our politics, it was our politics. And I think that is really important to understand. But I think what happened was that a lot of women who became - um, who found some spirituality, you know, and often wicker and nature based, but found spirituality through feminism and then started - I think two things happen - then started to get into all sorts of healing, so doing crystal healing and, and yoga and hands on stuff...

Reiki?

Reiki, and, and all of those things. And at the same time started to somehow disconnect from the collective into the individual and started to lose their feminism and that collective action. And that's one of the things we talk about a lot in From the Flames was almost how the spiritual journey became the important one, and individual, and women - so where we'd been at Greenham and women would massage each other, and give each other reflexology, and Indian Head massages and all of that suddenly, women we're all becoming counsellors and therapists, and crystal healers and charging for it. And it felt - and I think that happened a bit when Thatcher started cutting benefits and people were having to go out and work. So it was very interesting.

Yes.

Very interesting what, happened and I think that was a dissipation away from the political and into individualised, um ways of being. And I suppose - so the reason I stayed I think in the Violence Against Women and Girls movement in the broad movement was for me, it was still

about collective action. And it was also actually quite academic and intellectual, and academia was informing practice and practice was informing academia. And I really liked that - I didn't want to just disappear into my own navel, really, because my spirituality had always been my energy for political action.

Right. Yes, yes. Because I think it was the time in the mid to late '80s into the early '90s that Thatcher introduced the concept of internal markets, so that you are getting nurses who would have willingly stayed on after the end of a shift to help a patient, saying 'Well, I'm not being paid for that, so I'm going to do it'. So it got monetised.

Yes. And I think everything got monetised, including our spirituality. And I think I was very blessed in that, you know, I started working for Worcester Rape Crisis Centre. And, you know, as I say, I think violence against women, you know, was still very feminist as it is now. And um then I moved down here - Autumn 1991. I moved down here at the beginning of '92. And my partner Phil got a job running St Austell Arts Centre, which is why we came down and we decided to live together, which was a bit radical for us! You know, I was never gonna be in a nuclear family and then Jem was six, and he said 'Oh, can't we live together?'. So we did the opposite of everybody else who split up when their kid's 6, we moved in together, which is really quite interesting. And I was coming down here - we just really started From the Flames. I was going to come, I was going to write, I was going to walk the moors, I was going to learn to paint, and be very creative. And after about, oh, I don't know, less than a year probably, um I started getting very bored. I also thought that I would find radical feminists everywhere I went and I didn't really.

No, no.

So I thought, you know, I thought this movement I just thought, you know all there'll be loads of them down in Cornwall. Because there'd been some women's land - when we were at Greenham - here'd been some women's land near Penzance - an American a woman had owned,

and I think had come down once she had it as a retreat. So I just thought oh god there'll be loads of feminists. And, and I, so I wasn't meeting people, and it was a strange experience for me. I'm going off now, but...

But it's about like minded people, people that you...

Absolutely.

The expectation was that you'd...

I thought Greenham women were everywhere!

...that you'd find the same kind of energy in Cornwall, and, no.

It really wasn't here.

Quite shocking sometimes?

It was, it still sort of shocks me really. And, of course, I was travelling up to Nottingham to produce From the Flames. And so was very linked in to a community of women that were ex-Greenham, and at the same time we were also running Spiral Women's Camps. Has anyone talked to you about Spiral Women's Camps?

I don't think they have.

Okay, so well, they came out of Greenham women who had, I suppose, in some ways, maybe disconnected from Greenham, which started becoming a different entity and felt like it had a hierarchy of women who'd been there a long time and it didn't feel like it was ours anymore, but wanted to be out on the land with other women. So once or twice a year there were groups of us - and a lot of them were connected through From the Flames, had Spiral Camps. So we had some Spiral Camps in Wales, Yorkshire, primarily in Shepton Mallet quite near where the Glastonbury site, and literally we'd rent three or four fields,

and women would come with tents. We'd have some taps, and we'd create this village of amazingness and creativity and we put on theatre and have workshops, and, and lived on the land for a couple of, couple of weeks at a time. So, so Spiral Camps came out of that. So we're all quite busy and from the flames and then um, I um, I saw a poster I've been down here about a year I think - I saw a poster saying that a helpline for rape and sexual abuse survivors was closing and that they wanted more women involved, and that was down in Redruth, I think. So I thought I'd go to the meeting. I'd gotten involved with another organisation around learning disability. But it wasn't quite, I hadn't, I hadn't found the women and the women I met through the art scene with Phil - because he was running the Arts Centre and putting on dance and theatre, just again, I just, you know, and I was, for the first time in my life I was seen as Phil's partner, which was an extraordinary thing for me when I'd been this big, strong, independent woman. So um, so I went to that meeting, and I met a woman there called Val, who I walked in, and we just clicked and she'd got dreads, and she was a wild woman, and she'd been to Greenham. And she'd read Mary Daly. And so we did just bllllllum (fast chatting noise). And so what happened was that that other helpline sort of finished, and so Val and I become friends. She was doing an MA in women's studies, she took me to meet a whole group of women who were doing the Plymouth MA in women's studies, and round a kitchen table once again we set up the Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre, which the Women's Centre morphed from, um not last year, but the year before, no, 20th March 2018, we turned from being the Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre into the Women's Centre. So Val and I sort of were the founding members of the Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre. And we've held that spirit of Greenham here, you know, not not massively overtly..

No but it's there.

But that energy is still here. And those ideas, and that idea of radical feminism, you know, and eco-feminism, the sort of melding of eco-feminism and radical feminism, I think, really is at the heart of the organisation. Although as I say, we're really a very inclusive lot. So you

know, you don't have to be, you know, you don't have to say you're a radical feminist to become part of us. But we, you know, everyone who works for us goes through the same training, which does have an element of you know, you know, fairly heartfelt radical feminism at its centre. So, it feels for me that, you know, I mean, if I showed you around, you'd see lots of creative stuff here. And a lot of the work we do with women is very creative. So, you know, we do have a lot of art groups, our young women's group is all around art and writing and creating. Um we, we do body therapies here, so we do lots of alternative therapies and also, you know, we take women out in nature, we've got a walking group, so women who've been abused, you know, have got, we don't just do talking therapies. And, and so really, you know, I, I really do believe that that day in December 1982 - that energy is still held here in this little place in Cornwall, via little nucleus of women who you know carried Greenham home and you know still carry them in their heart really.