

Lynne Wilkes

So shall we start with maybe discussing how you came to be in the peace movement?

Yeah, it started before Greenham. Um, the sort of CND, going on marches in London. So that was always sort of part of my, you know, my belief system. And I remember when I was 16 joining Greenpeace - my dad was part of it. And I just remember at 16 being very aware, that was quite important work. And then that's what naturally led on to the sort of CND movement and being an art college student very much, you know, that was part of where I was, and, yeah, so I think it's no surprise that it was going to lead into sort of what I felt about wanting to be part of Greenham, and um, it was a natural sort of stepping stone, I think.

And what made - what was the sort of moment that you decided you were going? What was it that made you?

Yeah, well, I think I wanted to go before but I was pregnant, like your good self, and I felt, you know, that sense of vulnerability and protection. So I felt my heart was there, but my physical presence felt - you know, I didn't want to do that, it felt - my intuition said no, it's really important to be safe with this baby. And, and I still felt that when he was born, Joe was born in 1981, end of 1981, where it was all beginning and, and we were living in London - in Brixton, at the time of the riots. That was quite interesting. I was at Goldsmiths, just finishing a teaching degree, and then moving down to, to be with my parents that was outside of Reading. And it's only by moving to Reading eventually, that I joined the Women's Centre - sort of child care group, and met - started to meet like minded - because I didn't know anybody, sort of like minded women, and who's a very close by now - she started the Reading Greenham women's support group. And that's how I got involved, really, with the...

So was it through a sort of feminist lens that you became involved or

more of a...

Yeah, both, I think both. It is all encompassing. You know, it's interesting - I've been reflecting on, as an older woman now, and this woman - you know, I was in my sort of mid 20s, um - what was all that about? You know, what was that whole instinctual sense of, er, I was called - drawn there, I think on lots of levels, on lots of levels. I split up from my husband in that time - when Joe was 3. And again, I think, you know, when you're going through that phase, you're looking for sisterhood and support from women, and women in similar situations, and women in general, I think. So that was very empowering. So it was, it was really an easy sort of route to begin, you know, I didn't have to even try it was like falling on my lap, and it felt right. And yeah, and I think it was great to support, because I knew having, you know, such a tiny child, I didn't really want to take him to be - and I was, I breastfed til he was three. So I was very much involved in that, so bringing him up was my, my priority. But each time I could have, I would I would go if that makes sense. Do you know what I mean?

Yeah. So did you go on weekends, or whenever you...

Yeah, so the support group was very much - we decided to support Blue Gate, because they were quite vulnerable. They were right on the road. That's where the bailiffs and munchers would come and take all the stuff away the next morning.

Munchers being the bins?

Yeah, so all their cookery stuff, everything - bedding, sort of benders would just all be put in. So it was a very...

When was this? Do you remember what year?

It must have been about 1983 / '84. And I think, you know, sort of seeing - so how do they live then, how can they live when their home has been taken away? Every morning going into winter. So our support

group really was, um - we did this thing called night watch where we would go two nights a week and have like, I think it was - what was the timing? 8 until 2 - that was one group of women, and then 2 til 6. So we changed over, so the women could go to sleep, to go to bed and we would sit around the fire, keep the fire going, and if there was, you know anybody going to disturb them, or cruise missiles coming we would wake them up, so we were sort of there to make sure they slept.

And you did that for a couple years?

Yeah, yeah. So um, and that was quite amazing, you know, just being almost like, I don't know what the right word is, but just there to, to support and help them protect, um - like guardians, in a way it was quite interesting. And to allow them the safety of sleep, and energy for what they were, they were choosing, you know, they were putting their lives in Greenham common every day, and that wasn't my choice because I had a little child that was my priority. So, and the more I went there, the more I got more intrigued about, you know, like I was stepping out of when I felt I wasn't no longer breastfeeding I felt I could sort of do a little bit more, you know, that felt right. And um, so the first thing was an action which is - was quite powerful to me was that we decided, our little group, we would go in on Bonfire Night, because, and let off fireworks on common ground. So we obviously decided, you know, Bonfire - November the 5th, we're going to do that. And so of course you have to sort of think of actually, you know, most of us had to get back for our kids to take them to nursery and school. So we had to get childcare, you know, that whole support system, we had to get, and there were women who weren't prepared to go in, but they were happy to hang around in cars, or around the base. Because I was just said to my friend recently thinking, we didn't have mobile phones - didn't have phones in those days. So you couldn't say, right, meet you at Blue Gate, because if you're being chucked out by the army and the police, they could chuck you out anywhere, and it's a very wide perimeter. But for the grace of God, you know, I just knew I had to get back for 7 o'clock to take Joe to nursery! You know that was my thought - I've got to do that, got to do that. So yeah, so we were obviously, we went in and for me it was the

scary bit was running across this um, massive runway - it just seemed forever, like ants on a, you know, tiny ants sort of scabbling across, and then lying down when the lights would come round - the search lights, getting on our bellies, and then we got onto the grass and we said right okay, let's let's let off some fireworks. Let's actually celebrate this night. And we were obviously having a great time, we all knew what our names were my name was Catherine Wheel - there were all sorts of funny false names. And thinking yeah, we're doing really well here. And then we were arrested, and this was I don't know must be about 10 o'clock at night. And that's started to feel a bit scary. You know, guys with six foot guns...

What were you specifically being arrested for? What were you doing?

Because we shouldn't have been there. You know, that whole thing, you know, we're arresting you because...

Trespassing?

Yeah, exactly. So as a group, you feel very strong. You're singing all the songs and you feel that, you know, you can cope, and then the next minute and then they say, 'Who are you?', and they didn't get my name at first, they didn't see the joke of why I chose that name. Then they separate you, and that's when you start to feel very vulnerable and you start to think...

So where were you then?

Somewhere in the middle of the base, somewhere in an office.

In a portacabin or something?

Yeah. So they drove us to, you know, a portacabin and started to take details. 'Who are you? Where do you live? What's your name?' And, and obviously, put it through the whole court proceedings. And then they said, 'We know your name isn't Catherine Wheel, what is your

name?' Because of-course I had to say what my false name was. And and then at that point, I thought, I just need to get out. I need to get back. And I didn't know where they were going to drop me off. Like I said before, you had no idea where they were going to just drop you off. And luckily, there was somebody in a car waiting. So that was, you know, because I don't know what I would have done - I would have walked back to Reading, you know- which would have taken me all night. So that was really interesting, that sense of really feeling fear, because there was a lot of fear. Personally for me, and I think when you do have a child, your whole fear thing goes into another level, you know, before that, you know, fear is, it seems so different. And now you're going - actually, this isn't just about me, actually, I'm here - I am here - about me, and what I care about affecting everybody on the planet, but actually, there's a little person that I am sort of responsible for. So that was always my priority, had to keep getting back for that. So, so that sort of felt for me quite a powerful thing to have stepped out into, and then going to court - being able to stand up and say, yeah, you know, this is what I've done. I think because it would have been easy to go no, I'm not going - I didn't have to go to court - they didn't know - they just thought my address was Greenham common, so they couldn't find me, couldn't find me and my name. So, but I think it was really important to to be counted. You know, the whole point was that you know, if you talk to the women that were living there, it was a sense that we want to really make their lives awkward in the court, we want to give them some work - they're not doing any work and all this is going on. So it was supporting that, and I was reflecting with my friend who started the Greenham Support Group, and I was saying that - er - what was I saying? What was I just saying? Gone off, can't think what I was about to say, yeah, the Greenham women who lived there day out, day in, were quite different from us sort of visitors. Because a lot of women were visitors, weren't they - talking with women that came all over the world?

Really important.

Yeah. But they would just, they were just different. They were just like really quite bolshy and strong. And you know, it's like, that's where they

lived. And so it became their home. And we sort of almost kept coming into their home. You know, they welcomed us. So I had very different energy, very different....

And how did you feel about - because by then Greenham was women only, wasn't it?

Yeah.

How did you feel about that - I know you had male visitors in the day. What was that like - the experience of women only?

Yeah, no, I think that's what I was saying, initially, I think, you know, being a single parent, having a lot of women friends, it felt a really good space. I think - you start to realise that there's no hierarchy, there's nobody telling you what to do, the whole patriarchal thing, and arguments and who wants to be in charge - and that's what happens in a lot of groups of men, you know - the loud voices and trying to sort it all out and take charge. It's very much that sort of collaborative, collective, peaceful, kind, easy, sisterhood - really. And I think for me, that was probably the first time I sort of felt that in such a way, do you know what I mean? From my Reading group, as well as the women there and women I met, and the whole sense I was part of something was much bigger than I could ever imagine, really. Which is fantastic.

Did you always stay at Blue Gate?

Yeah, well, er yes, so that was our main goal that we supported, but we liked to - so we did other things like oh, let's go and visit - so Red Gate, that was just a longer bit, was right on the main road and nobody lived there because it was just the gate, and then gravel, and then the road so it would be really hard. So we used to go to the other side of the road and make a fire, and make some sort of presence that we were there. I think I've got a few pictures of that, and do things on the fence and everything. And we - yeah and there was one weekend the whole lot was said let's - I think there was some demonstration or action going on,

or celebrations, and we said 'Why don't we create our own gates - our own colour?' So we went between blue and green, I said 'What about Aquamarine?', you know, so that's what we did. And we made you know, made a bender and took stuff for the weekend. So that was amazing to sort of create that for ourselves. But we got we got too near the fence, and the soldiers kept lobbing those rocks at us, and I thought we don't need - yeah like, big stones just lobbing...

Did they hit any of you?

Well almost, you know, so I said I think we should move the bender back, you know, I said 'There's no way I'm going to go to sleep.' You know, knowing that something could be...

Hitting you in the skull?

Yeah, no, absolutely. So yeah, so that was great to sort of experience, experience that - obviously not like the sort of women that were there all the time, but to sort of have a glimmer - a sense of how it was.

Were there any particular people - and you need to name them, but just were there any particularly people that really stood out to you as inspiring - that changed your...

Well, I think - Blue Gate, I don't know if you know, but they were basically 19 year olds, that - that that was - Blue Gate was all about the young lesbians that were really angry, and were doing all kinds of things, you know, at weekends would go to London, and when sex shops were those sort of secretive, funny little places, they put superglue in the locks - they were always doing something. They were the radical ones. And we just so happened to be supporting that gate. So I think it was being around them. It was quite extraordinary to see that energy. To see a sense where they were quite invincible, and, and that allowed you to go 'Yeah. Wow, you know, I'm not like that at the moment, you know, I can feel like that but I don't if I could just do that.' But it began to rub off a little bit do you know what I mean? It felt like we started doing

things, because Reading at that point was a really political place, that there was this alternative anarchist magazine that we were in part - they was supporting Greenham, there were articles written every single week, and I was doing the design and, you know, miners' strike things, and it was it was a very...

Why do you think that was happening in Reading - the sort of political fervor?

I think there was certain group of people, that were just wanting to form a collective really, and so you can look at Red Rag, the archives and virtually every week - I was looking at that thinking oh my god, I did that cover. Oh my god - that's my writing. Oh, you know, I think I didn't realise - I think I was looking at like, there's always something happening every day, you know, some sort of political thing.

Do you feel like Reading's like that now?

No, no. Well, it may be, but there's no magazine, there's no, it was quite extraordinary actually, for that time. It felt like that was the life I was leading, you know, it's like where we're going now? what's going on? And obviously, having a little, a little child in tow.

How did your parents, or family, or partner feel about your political engagement?

Yeah, I mean I think it was at a time when - yeah, that was the other thing because, you know, I've got a good relationship with my parents. But my dad - what came up for me who was he is just really sexist, and he's just just always talking about himself. And I just went through that phase of really recognising that, yeah...

An awakening?

Definitely an awakening. And so on my 30th birthday I just told him what I thought really, but in a very articulate way, I wasn't ranting at him

- I wasn't getting angry, my voice wasn't getting louder. So I just said 'You just need to listen to me, dad', you know, because I was saying the truth, I wasn't being angry for angry's sake. But there was a sense that I needed to say that, and I think my hair was probably a bit longer than it was, and it just got shorter, and shorter, and shorter. And then I got a number two - I was looking like Sinead O'Connor and, and then my little boy had the same cut - we both had a little tiny plait - the remains of the long hair. And, and that was great to do as well - that sense of being very comfortable with my face - I didn't need my hair to hide my face, that I actually quite liked my face and, and I felt strong, you know, and I think as a single parent, you know, you're sort of looking for a sense of, yeah some inner strength about about all that. And, and I knew quite a lot of single parents and again, they are in the Greenham support group. So it was, and then I met a lot of obviously, with the Women's Centre, I met a lot of lesbians. So that became another - just this amorphous group actually that, you know, women coming together for all kinds of reasons. And, and I think when, yeah but Blue Gate it was - I mean if we'd gone to Yellow Gate, which we did sometimes, you're talking to the elders that were represented - they were the representatives on the sort of media.

Did you know any of them?

No not really, as I say we talked to them but I didn't really know them and, and each gate had a character so like Violet Gate was where all the hippies went, you know, that was all tucked away in that, so they felt safe, they could take their children and create their community. And it was great. They had - each gate, each colour gate had character, and you could put yourself where you wanted. So it was interesting we went with the 19 year olds, who were raging, and I think it was, in a way it was like, because I'm very much involved in mental health now because I teach mindfulness, and I think that was a real - that's where a lot of women went to find something to help them, you know, their well being their mental health, you know, you could see that some were really suffering, and, but they found something there for them.

Do you think that that had an impact on your choice to be involved with mental health?

Well I was an art teacher, I got back into art teaching and then I got into - I trained to be an acupuncturist. So I got into healing, so healing became my passion. Which, yeah, then I started to see the male and female energies in a different way, because it's very easy to be at Greenham and to have that sort of 'Men are bastards, men are trash'. You know, that's, that's sort of what you did at that point, you know, and I thought I've got to be careful because I've got a little boy, and I can't keep saying that because he's going to be a little man one day, but it was a phase you have to go through to come out and see the wider...

Solution?

Yeah, absolutely. So I think acupuncture got me into healing. And, um, that sort of carried on really now.

I suppose that relates to NVDA, doesn't it?

Yeah, absolutely.

What were your feelings about NVDA - what are your feelings about?

In terms of what?

Well, just did you have much experience of it at Greenham?

Not a lot, really. I mean, I was very much in my bubble of, um, just when I sort of look back - I think if I'd gone now, it'd been so different. I was quite a different person then.

So were you early 20s?

Yeah, well, sort of mid 20s. I had Joe when I was 24. And I think it really, yeah, it was like you said it was an awakening. It was a sense of,

wow, nothing's happened like this before in my life. I've had to do other things, that I've had to show my courage and bravery and strength, but this was very different. This was very, very different. And it was like each step I was learning another aspect of myself in that, and, and the sort of, yeah, the collective really. But it was, um, yeah. And I'm very - when I talk about it to the people I feel very proud I was there, because I could have easily not been there. When I think about you know, that crossroads.

Probably would have been easier for you to not have been there?

Yeah, I think if I hadn't have had Joe, I would have been in a very different capacity. You know, I might have been living there. I might have been doing all sorts, but I think you know, having a child sets you on a different path - not completely. So, yeah, so I feel very, I'm really, I feel very blessed. Very grateful that I chose to explore that, really.

And how many times were you arrested?

Only that once. Yeah, I didn't really feel - I think again, it's just because of having a small child and you know, choosing that. I mean, I was talking to my friend...

Lots of women have said that - the juggling...

Yeah, you just go actually - they are your priority really, and there shouldn't be a compromise around that. So it's that balance that you're seeking to, to be who you are and what you want to do. And then this other little person that you really are caring for. And, you know, I've never really spoken to my son and said - well perhaps I should you know, he's just had a child, I'm a grandmother. You know, what, what was his recollections of - what did he feel? I mean, he was quite young, so he probably thought - I mean I think kids of that age just go with the flow, don't they? You know, he loved poking fires, there's picture of him I've got - just always poking the fire, had a fascination with fires.

What did you feel - thinking both as a Greenham woman but also as parent, what was the threat of nuclear like in the '80s?

Yeah, again, it was scary. You know, these weapons of mass destruction, cruise missiles going on roads, which are quite little around Newbury, and we're not a million miles from Newbury - and not being selfish - you just think well, we would have been massively hit, you know, as well as everything else. And I just...

Do you remember seeing the cruise missiles?

Oh, yeah, I remember, sort of, you know, sitting tight in front of the gates to stop it coming in. Yeah, and just being moved away by the police, you know.

What were they like to look at? Do you remember?

Yeah, they're just the - feeling they were just huge, really - they're much bigger than you can anticipate.

Could you give us a like, a sort of comparison?

No not really, there's nothing that compares, I think, just the feeling of what they were carrying. They have this...

Weight?

...Exaggerated substance which felt horrid, and scary, and wrong. And, and you were just so tiny, really - but you weren't tiny because you were this group...

You wonder how the drivers must have felt, as well carrying that cargo?

Yeah, exactly. I know. They must have just put themselves into their - like carrying fish fingers or something. I wonder if they put themselves in that mindset? Because if you think about it too much...

What was your relationship like with soldiers, police, while you were there?

Yeah, well, I wasn't bolshy then - I would have been bolshy now. Probably, I think again, it was that thing of being this young mother - I just didn't want to be too bolshy like a lot of women around me. So I just practiced sort of nonviolent communication really, and so I didn't want anything...

Like, could you give us an example?

Yeah. Yeah. So I would not - I wasn't quiet but I chose my words rather than some of the Greenham women just didn't care what they said. Not didn't care - they did care - that's what they said it. It was my like, my god they said that! Whereas I would say that now but I just felt vulnerable because of where I was really. But I wasn't afraid to talk. But I didn't use the language which I probably would have liked to have used. It's weird that isn't it, really?

It's age?

Yeah, because you know, I feel a different person - it'd be great to go back now, actually! (Laughs). I know exactly what I would do. Not that I wasn't doing anything then, I was.

What did you think about all the Extinction Rebellion stuff yesterday?

Yeah, no, I think, yeah, I would have - part of me would like to be involved in that. I think it's, I think as you get older, I mean, I'm 61 you just go - so many choices we have, and my work is very much about helping people - do you know what I mean? I've just been training to do mindfulness and self compassion, which is much more powerful than mindfulness. And it is about looking at people's mental health in a way that is crucial at the moment - much more than it was in the '80s.

In what way?

I just think because the world is spinning at this extraordinary rate. And there's pressure, and identity, and social media. And I think the problems seem very different from my perspective. And what I - and schools, I teach mindfulness in schools, and I am a consultant for the Goldie Hawn Foundation. So I'm seeing it in schools.

What's that about - the Goldie Hawn Foundation?

Yeah. So it's basically she started this 13 years ago in the States as a result of seeing that children weren't happy . So how do you get children happy in schools? You know, there's absenteeism, there's a massive drug problem. So she threw all her money and celebrity at getting neuroscientists positive, sort of research workers, and teachers and bringing together a curriculum to take into schools to teach neuroscience mindful awareness. So children understand how their brain works, in order to help them help their mental health, and positivity, gratitude and kindness starts changing the brain. And children work, but then children can work and be happy. It's as simple as that, really. So we go around and deliver this program to schools all over the country. And so yeah, so I've seen it in schools. I think mental health in schools is absolutely, rocket high. And, you know, I teach eight week group - eight week courses to the public. And I just keep seeing it, and seeing it - that people are not classified with a mental health problem, it's people like our good selves are suffering, suffering on so many different levels. So yes, I'm seeing that and I think it's really important work I'm doing, actually. So it feels that whole Extinction Rebellion is like - yeah, yeah, that's, yeah, here comes another Greenham thing, but I think...

It's interesting how much they were using the techniques of nonviolent direct action as well. Civil disobedience, the Suffragettes..

Absolutely.

You could really see the feminist pioneering movements there...

Absolutely.

I just thought it was really interesting.

Well, that's what he's done - he's brought about a lot of what people have done in the past as a collective...

But very specifically women as well, I think.

Yeah, no, which is great. And that's how it should be. I think now we are I mean, I'm very much into the planets and astrology and what's happening up there - planetary is very much about dissolving of the patriarchy. And we're going to see a lot of changes.

Do you align with a particular strain of feminism now? Like radical or liberal?

I don't - yeah, I don't know. Where would I put myself? I am a feminist and I don't align myself, I don't think. And I think that came through the sense of becoming a healer - seeing a different perspective. And knowing where I am in that as a woman, and how, you know, I like to be spoken to, or what I feel - I'm not afraid to say, and I'm passionate about sort of children and girls having, and women having, a voice to actually, you know, consider something, you know, to know there's a choice rather than this is it. And I think it's - and I'm really enjoying the journey of listening to, you know that the role of women and how that's changing in our society in terms of if it's equal pay, I mean, it is really the whole - the sort of the matriarchy is really coming up now, and we can see that it's that's very obvious, isn't it?

Er, yeah.

I think so. You know, bit by bit. We've got way to go, but I think it is dissolving, and but then you've got women who, and I don't know if they

are feminists, but feeling they have this equality to men and want to be like men, you know, that's where I find that balance for me feels a bit - I don't quite get it. I don't get it. I'm not saying...

It's like Thatcher, isn't it? It's like going in as a woman and taking your token space rather than going in as a feminist and changing the space.

Absolutely. Yeah. So I feel that, you know, that sense of, and I feel understanding, healing from being an acupuncturist, that actually women's energy is different than men's energy. Because it is when you know, when I used to treat a woman, and a man - it's, it is different. It's not better. It's just different. It's different. And I think that allowed me to go actually, as a woman, we need to take care of our bodies so much more than men, rather than we keep pushing ourselves, like the male drive, that we don't have to do that, we can do in a different way, and still be strong and still be equal and powerful. But that's, I sort of understood that as getting into healing and understanding energy, I think - that's where I've come from with that. Yeah.

Did you feel that was influenced by Greenham?

Yes. A part of it. It has to be doesn't it? It has to be, it has to be.

Yeah, quite an influential time of your life, 25, isn't it?

No, absolutely. And I think and I'm glad - because I think if I hadn't had that experience, who knows, like any of our experiences - where we are at any given point.

What were your most striking memories of Greenham, when you when you think of it, what are the memories that are really vivid? Important?

Yeah, I think it's like - so many, it's difficult to sort of, you've got the sort of, the real massive coming together. You know, the power that feels as a woman, that when women get together, there's this extraordinary strength, which is difficult to describe really, actually. You don't

experience it, normally. That women from different ages and different backgrounds coming together with the same sort of focus - it's, it's, it gets huge I think, so that was, that was one end of it. And then just sitting around the fire, you know, getting back into connecting with this old ritual that brings people around the fire, that's always happened and just sitting and not having to talk - you know, that sounds just sitting with being quiet, being peaceful, at peace connecting.

Do you have memories of food and things like that - cooking?

Yeah. So, um, yeah, there's sort of the primal thing of surviving, you know, that is - it for, for the women that lived there it was surviving. Not not for the weekenders like myself actually. So there was this amazing woman in Ascot called Merle - had some money, got a van and her thing was to go every night through the winter, it was a very cold - that winter whenever it was a very, very cold, to take the van out with clean dry blankets for all the gates, and for food for all the gates, so it meant that I - that's when I got guys involved, I thought you know, we don't have to cook as well. So because this great area, this very political group, I said, 'Right, okay, who wants to do baked potatoes and chili?' So I was getting like different groups, and then I gathered it up, and I was in charge of East Reading, where we are now - that was what I did, and went out because - if all your stuffs taken by the bailiffs and the muncher everyday, what - how do you eat? Even a hot drink, you know? So that was a very practical - simple...

Did you watch the bailiffs taking stuff, did you?

Yeah, no. So if you're on the late duty, so if you're doing night watch between 2 and 6, that's when you would see it, because that's when they will come - first thing in the morning. They would get them up - just take everything and put them in this muncher, particularly Blue Gate because they were right by the road - they're very vulnerable. That's why we supported them I think, because if you're, if you're in the woods like Violet - they just didn't go there.

Yeah.

And I think they sort of left the Yellow Gate women alone because they're the ones, you know the spokespeople, and they were the elders, and somehow they - and they've got their little caravans didn't they? So they were that was quite different for them, where Blue Gate was just surviving on sort of levels, that you can't imagine - their hot water bottles were just full of ice.

Yeah. Were you there during the winter?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Night watch you just - you just crack on and keep the fire going. I remember first time we did this a few of us - we thought oh my god, we're not keeping the fire going, we're really useless - how embarrassing - before they wake up, let's get this fire going. And it's just funny little things like that, isn't it? Funny little memory. But yeah, and then there was this beauty of you know, when you're doing a late night watch and the sun comes up, and you're sitting there, and that stillness of the first morning, and sitting again - there's something about sitting around a fire, isn't there?

Did you experience or watch - aside from the rocks, you said, were being thrown over - did you experience or watch any violence from authoritative figures?

Yeah, I mean, I think because some of the women were - how do I put it? Yeah, were a bit bolder and angrier, yeah, they didn't mind stepping out bit. And I think whether or not that was - I'm not saying they were - they weren't antagonistic, but they may have been perceived as antagonistic. So there was a bit of ruffling going on and, you know, sort of bad words and everything. So I saw some of that.

And when you say ruffling?

Yeah, sort of felt like they got a bit too close, and they're in a slightly argy-bargy, the pushing - I know when we were sitting, stopping cruise

missiles coming in, you know, I sort of felt this police man sort of hauled me out a bit, sort of, he could have done it much more kindly - he didn't hurt me. But it was a sort of sense, you know, come on get out of the way and pulled me rather than could have just done that differently. And I remember thinking, wow, if he'd have done that any more, that would have hurt. So there's sort of levels you didn't quite know. And I think for some women, they didn't mind that. Just observing that. Because I just - because they didn't care. They didn't care about what they were doing. They're cared about being there, whereas like I didn't want to get involved in too much argy-bargy, really.

Did you observe any kind of, or maybe in the night watch team - did, were there ever challenges and conflicts that you had to overcome? And if so, how did you do that?

Yeah, I mean, again, like I think I began our conversation with, I think, you know, being a nonliving, Greenham woman - as in living there day to day, week to week. I think we were seen a bit differently. They were appreciative of what we did. But actually, they didn't show that, and sometimes you felt they made you feel a bit silly. Sometimes - I'm not saying that, but that didn't bother me. I just thought, well, I don't blame them. Perhaps I would do that if I was them. Do you know what I mean, I didn't want to judge that. But I was...

It's interesting actually, interviewing lots of women who lived there. They just talk about how important the weekenders were, and night watch, and the people who came in - to revitalise the camp. So it's interesting. Some women have said, 'Oh, I wasn't - I wasn't - I was only there a little bit. So I don't know if you'll want to speak to me, because I only came at weekends.' And we were like no, no, no - you were a crucial part of the survival of that camp.

Absolutely.

So I think I think, um, that's been quite clear. Actually that's been quite clear in interviews that we've done.

No. I think I think as I said before, I think Blue Gate were very different. They were very just - radical lesbians who were just on it, you know what I mean? Very different from all the other gates. So, but I was quite fascinated with that, do you know what I mean? I just felt like they were...

Did you know, Rebecca Johnson?

No, not personally, I know who she is, but she wasn't really around Blue Gate. I think we were still very much aligned around that was -

She set it up though, I think. Maybe moved to another...

Yeah. No, but it, then it just became the, you know, the 19 year olds who, and I think what came with that was, again, a lot of young women with a lot of serious mental health. And that's not easy when you're, you know, you're a young woman and you don't have - what's the word? Like, I have the resources now, you know, it's sometimes felt a bit scary, do you know what I mean?

Absolutely, yeah.

But I think if you're living there, everyone knows how to be - um I remember there was a woman called Metal Mickey or Metal...

Yeah. Metal Mickey.

Yeah. And she was quite scary. I remember sort (laughs), because you just felt that there was an unpredictability about her. But again, she wouldn't bother me now. It was then - you know being a young woman and having a young child, I just felt there was a vulnerability about me.

What were your memories of Metal Mickey, then?

Well it was only once, but I just remember her sort of walking past me, and you just - she oozed this aura of total uniqueness of who she was. And she wasn't afraid. And, you know, you just think, wow, would it be like to be like that? Because I did recognise my fear. And it was frightening, I think, on different levels for different things, but it didn't put me off going, do you know what I mean? That was the thing. I think. It was really important to sort of feel the fear and do it anyway, sort of - do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

Terminology.

And so do you remember there being conflicts on the camp at all?

Um. It's a sort of goes in waves and I think, it's difficult, isn't it? I think there was the sense of the conflict between the antagonism from what the soldiers, and the army, and the police were doing. And then I think for some women, they just wanted to be antagonistic. There was a very little minority, and whether or not because it was the Blue Gate, sort of, you know, they, they just wanted - some wanted done to be angry. And that's not a bad thing. That's not a bad thing, you know? And, yes, and I just felt like, you know, what, some antagonism sets off another bit of antagonism doesn't it - I mean, it's that whole....

I suppose I just kind of think how hard it must have been to live - just, just to live and manage a camp...

No, it is. No, it isn't. No, it is, and you just think, as a sort of weekender, you just go I couldn't do that. Do you know what I mean - day in, day out, because it was rough. It was absolutely rough to sort of sleep - there was no sort of blow up sleeping things. It was it was rocky, you know, and if they - sometimes they didn't have a bender, they were sort of sleeping, you know, when we're doing night watch they would just be sleeping near you, you know, in a sleeping bag. And I think, you know, your whole sense of comfort is eroded. And so you just don't want any

hassle from - and I could see that, and I could get that, it's almost like, I'm just doing this and I'm here. And they're doing their best, aren't they? So it's easy for me to sort of come in and go, god, what's all this antagonism, but actually they've got every right to be that. Anybody would be - I'd probably be doing that. You know?

And as you say there was so much peacefulness and organisation as well.

Yeah, absolutely. It's almost like, how do we survive all this? What do we do in order to get through this, together, all through this together, you know - we must do this. And carry everybody with all kinds of issues, problems - do you know what I mean, it felt like people carried each other, and even though I wasn't used to some of what was going on, I just felt like I just embraced it and thought, wow, you know, this is this is teaching me a lot here. I felt I was, yeah, it was a real lesson to understand, you know, to, to develop compassion, actually, which was really important.

Do you talk about Greenham very much any more?

Yeah, yeah, no, I do. In-fact I was in the hairdresser's getting my hair cut, and I like my hairdresser, but it suddenly went silent - it went really silent, and I could tell people were listening, and then I realised what I do I go, 'Yeah, we've got this - we bought common land back', you know, sort of trying to turn it into like so. 'Yeah, yeah, I walked my dog there'. I went 'Yeah, because some of us sort of made sure that happened', you know, trying to turn it into like so they can get it. Because if you go too heavily into the sort of politics, people just go like that. Or like you're like you're a dirty Greenham woman.

Yeah, and what do you think your son feels?

He's very proud. Yeah, I know he is. I know he is.

Do you think that your politics must have impacted him?

Yeah, no, absolutely. I mean, it's interesting. I've always sort of um, come from a sort of Labour family. My dad was a, my grandfather sorry - was a coal miner. And so Labour has always been the politics, but actually, I sort of being a healer, I've gone right into the sort of last 25 years being the Green Party, just because I feel that makes sense to me, you know, about the planet and everything. And so, yeah, and he's sort of married a very sort of political Labour person. She did politics at Reading, so yeah, so he's getting it from all angles! (Laughs).

Do you feel your feminism impacted him when you were raising him?

Yeah, I think so. I do. I think, and it's quite emotional talking about him because I think he's, he's quite extraordinary, really. We've got very, very close relationship and I'm very proud of him on so many levels, really. And yeah, he was part of the journey. And he was...

Yeah, well he was there.

Yeah. And saw me without hair - you know, looking like Sinéad O'Connor. Yeah, and there's no sort of, yeah, still have that very close, very close relationship. And we still have, and will always have. And I've done all sorts of alternative things throughout my life, and he's been there all the way along the journey, really, and sort of will laugh in a good way, you know, rather than as a derogatory.

Did you feel you learned about motherhood when you were at Greenham from other mothers that were there?

Yeah, I didn't see a lot of mums there because they were in the woods. So the Violet Gate was the - it's a shame really, because I think, for me, that would have been a great gate to support.

Yeah.

But somehow it felt like Blue Gate was where we went. Went to - yeah, 'cause my mum had gone - my mum and dad - I grew up in Africa. My dad, my mum and dad went back to do some work there. So my mum wasn't around - my mum and dad weren't around when I was doing Greenham, and I got very close with this German woman who was similar age to my mum. So she was doing - she was arrested on the bonfire night. She was the one that, yeah, so she wanted to go to court with her name and wanted to go to Holloway. So she, so she arrived in this suit with this like calico knapsack, you know, like a burglar would have. And the judge was her age and he did not want to send her. He felt very uncomfortable. And he didn't. So me and her got very, very close. I think she sort of - she never had a daughter, my mum was in Africa, and it felt like we we had this lovely sort of symbiotic relationship.

Are you still in touch?

So sadly she died. But we had - this is another lovely story. We, it was a Sunday and she goes, 'Oh, do you fancy a Sunday afternoon in Greenham, where should we go?' 'Oh, let's go to Orange Gate. And again....

What years later, do you mean?

No, at that time. Yeah, so we went to Orange Gate, which again, was off the beaten track a bit. And a woman said, 'Who fancies a Sunday afternoon drive?' And so we both 'Yeah. All right, then.' So they just cut this massive square, and just drove in! And I can always remember she had a tape, and it was...

Drove into where, sorry?

Into the base. So drove through the fence, through the fence. She just said, 'Okay, let's just cut a thing', drove in and me and Inga were - and it was the song 'All the leaves are brown' - 'California Dreaming'...

On the radio?

Yeah. And I just love that song. Always remember just going round - like let's just go for Sunday afternoon, drive!

So what happened?

Yeah, we went around - we were there for quite a while. And then we were stopped and interrogated, and luckily just told to go rather than get out - let's arrest you and on all that.

Yeah, because they were doing the strip searches at that point on the arrests weren't they?

Yeah, well, I wasn't involved in that, thank goodness. That must have been horrendous, horrendous, the worst. And what was interesting at that time I - because I was an art teacher I got offered a job at Reading prison, teaching art to the young remand-ers, teaching the guys there. And I was just studying to be an acupuncturist. So I was quite intrigued with the whole thing of what's going on here then, do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

And it was hard for me. And it was scary. But it was again, that's my life has been so many things like like, what am I doing here? (Laughs). How did I get here? What led me to this place? That is the story of my life, you know, sort of hold on a minute. (Laughs). Maybe I chose to. So yeah, it was...

Do you remember what the base was like when you drove into it? Could you describe it for us?

Yeah. Well it's interesting driving through the fence, because there was no gate. There's the gate there, which we couldn't get through, and they just clipped this great big square. It was surreal. It felt like this isn't really happening. How does this happen? How do you - one minute just

sitting there, and someone just said 'Let's do that.' 'Yeah. All right.' 'Do you want to come?' 'Okay.' And I looked at my German friend, and we're going oh my god, you know, these, these women are just lack of fear - just didn't give a monkey's, and we were going (sounds apprehensive) 'Yeah, okay!' Recognising that in ourselves - recognising it now. And yep, but feeling this expansiveness, like I said before about bonfire night about trying to get across this runway. It went on for - it wasn't miles, but it just felt like it was never-ending, trying to get across. It wasn't like a road. It was a massive highway. And so you're in there and you felt like woah, you could just see as far as the eye could see - because obviously when you're behind the fence, you don't, you just don't see that, there's things in the way and we were just like driving around. I thought this is huge. This is - there's nothing happening here, there shouldn't be a fence here, there should not be a fence. And there should not be cruise missiles on here either. And they should be nobody on here because, you know, this has been planted, and this was never - it always meant to be a common so...

Are you in touch with many of the women now?

Yeah, my friend who started the Greenham support group, because we - our daughters are the same - we got quite close when our daughters went to the same school around the corner. She's moved out of Reading. So she's the one that started the Greenham support group. And she started a telephone tree. There's this telephone tree that we're all on, and, and men were on that as well. And what was interesting was because in those days, we had, you know, like the old style phone, mine was on - I used to rent a house over the park that way, and it was on the wall. And I know that every time the phone went, somebody I was being tapped, you could hear all sorts of strange noises. Someone had obviously got my number from somewhere. And yeah, so it was just been really careful of that as well. So yeah, it was - for me it was interesting because I think it was the Greenham, and it was connected in with this Red Rag magazine with all things that were going on, and all the support that came behind that, with all sorts of people. And real respect for what we were doing, and real support and real

encouragement and always - it needed to be written about what was happening weekly, so it was going around to a lot of people in Reading this magazine and sorry...

Yeah, I was just going to say - actually I can't remember what I was going to say.

That happens at my age! (Laughs).

So Greenham has a very kind of small little tiny space on some syllabuses, but it's kind of like an optional thing within a history module or a politics module. It's not really well taught in the UK. Do you think that's one of the reasons that - 'cause obviously, one of the reasons for this project is that actually, it's remarkable how little people know about Greenham.

Yeah. And then it's funny how much people do.

Well younger generations.

Yeah, definitely.

I think a lot of the older people remember it in the press.

Yeah, no, that's true. And I think, yeah, on lots of levels of you know, that the press made Greenham women to be, you know, dirty and you know, bad mouthed women. I mean, I know I mentioned that a little bit, but that's to do with surviving. Because people have no idea. And some people don't know what really happened, what really happened and didn't want to know, so that I think there's a lot of lack of understanding and lack of education. And it was a massive bit of history, because we achieved what we wanted to achieve. That was huge. Huge. You know?

Yeah. Were you there when cruise left?

Yeah. And because it's just like, I mean, it's great to be just up the road. I mean, I think I think if I'd have been in France would I have done? I think I probably would have done I think because it was quite a unique, I think it was the first women's peace camp in the UK, wasn't it?

Yeah, er...

I think it was.

Certainly of that size, I think.

Yeah. So that's why I think it attracted. So I think, I think it does need to have a much bigger place in history particularly.

Why do you think it hasn't?

Don't know - bloody OFSTED! I don't know, really. Being a teacher I think, yeah, you know, is it something to do with women's politics, you know. Who's driving this syllabus and you know, what they perceive as important and, but it is history, and it did achieve. And it was very much to do with the Cold War and what was going on. That was a very, yeah, it's a very potent time, I think. And that is, the Cold War is on the syllabus.

Yeah.

So you think why isn't Greenham on the - a little bit bigger, you know? And you just wonder who is there going 'No, yes, maybe'? Who's in charge of those decisions? But I know I've talked about it a lot and 9 times out of 10 people are going 'Wow, that was fantastic. Well done you.' I always get really positive things. You know, because I don't think there are a lot of us around here, do you know I do feel - because women were sprinkled all over the place, and the people that I knew in Reading have moved on. And I mean, there's a woman I contacted, who's living in Ireland, and she's working with refugee women and I said, 'Lara, I can't find my photographs, have you got any photos?', you know,

so she was here living, and going with me and she's now somewhere else. And she was saying, 'Oh, yeah, my daughter, who went to the Royal College of Art, she keeps asking me about about it', you know, and then when I took my daughter - I had, I've got 10 years between my son and my daughter. So when I have my daughter, she was about 9 when the mayor of Newbury was saying 'It's common land', so she came with me and that whole cycle of ending it with her as a 9 year old girl, and she's very intrigued and you know - she's 25 now, and she's very sort of proud, do you know what I mean, and just sort of wants to know, information.

Yeah. What do you think the legacy of Greenham is?

That, that women weren't afraid to face this massive, you know, the massive power of cruise missiles and dictators and, who were trying to say, you know, this, you know, we sort of faced something that was quite colossal, I think - in sisterhood, and, and with real sort of diligence of, you know, we're in for the long haul here. We're not giving up, you know, so easy - I think a lot of groups going 'Oh we haven't got what we want. Let's go.' I mean, it was that sort of persistence, that sense of...

It was years and years.

Yeah, and enduring women's energy where we, you know, we've got that because we can bring children up - we have that. I mean, I remember in my healing thing, I very much follow the Buddhist philosophy and someone said to the Dalai Lama once, 'What's the most spiritual thing a person can do?' And he said, 'Just turn to any mother in this audience.'

Right.

And that is about devotion, isn't it? Women have this sense of devotion about - we can really care about something, and we're willing to put all of our selves into it in a different way than the man does it, I think.

I suppose we've been encouraged to do that, haven't we - by society?

Yeah, yeah. But I think...

Because I think there's lots of women at Greenham, and lots of women in the world who aren't maternal.

Yeah, I agree, I think because being a woman we have this sense of caring, which is very different, which is very different. It comes from a much more, like you said, it is a maternal caring, which is different from a caring, and that sense of connection, I think. I think women have extraordinary connection with each other - women who don't know each other can connect. We don't have to know, and I feel I'm connected with you and I don't know you, and I wouldn't feel the same if two guys were interviewing me. Do you know what I mean?

Absolutely.

I'm just saying that...

I think women only spaces are crucial.

Yeah, absolutely. And that women only space - I think, yeah 'cause all sorts of things are written - there was a peace camp at Molesworth at the same time. And there was all kinds of, you know, women getting raped and argy-bargy, and you're just thinking, why would you go there as a woman? Why would you? Why would you? You know? It's complicated, isn't it? I think but yeah, for me, I knew - what I think, what that opened up for me, what it confirmed to me. So I felt very humbled to be part of all that, actually.

And I think as well like the, I suppose the women who were at Greenham, who were mothers will have had such a political awakening that fed down to their children and the next generation.

Absolutely. I totally agree. Absolutely, absolutely. And I do feel I'm, I'm not afraid - I've been there's, I listened - because I'm on local radio quite

regularly on the well being programme, and, and I have rung up sometimes - this is way back on Radio 4 - something's happened and I'm not afraid to say my bit in it, really. I think people just need to know the truth. I think you know, this whole thing what people think, what they assume or perceive - it's not the truth and I think it's really important to represent your, your personal truth.

Yeah. In terms of nuclear threat today, how do you feel that's changed?

I don't know. It's - has it changed? It's just different, isn't it? It's different. You got nutters in America, haven't you - that could easily - but particularly, and you know. But I think you have to be very careful coming from the healing aspect of how we tap into our fear, because it is a fear, isn't it - rather than a reality. And if we're tapping into fear all the time, we sort of create that on other levels of our well being and our health. And we forget this beautiful world that we live in, actually, you know, just sitting here and listening to the birds, and feeling the sun on our face. And that's real. This is in the moment. This is why I teach with mindfulness. And that, to me is opened up another way of being happy on the planet, really. And I think Greenham was a sense of making another, yeah, creating that happiness on the planet by getting rid of that - those horrible weapons of mass destruction, and having this land that the planet so needs, you know. And what happens within that was just this extraordinary adventure of, and tangents that went out, went out with it, and it's, and it's a difficult question to answer, but I don't know if I have answered it really.

No, I think you answered it really beautifully. I think that's a lovely way to end the interview, actually - unless you wanted to add...

No, I think I've said quite a lot! (Laughs).