

Wendy Moorhouse Johns

So, could you just tell me a little bit about the first time you visited Greenham?

Well I was living in Leamington Spa there, then, which is a lot more radical and academic than the public tell you! (Laughs). And so I got involved then because there was a, like a women's group, and also I'd started the first women's - there was a magazine called Spare Rib, and they were asking people to start up women's groups, so I advertised in it and had one at my, well I wasn't living there then, because I used to live on a boat, which is another story, but I ended up with a canal side cottage, so a lot of really nice women came out of, the, nowhere and had meetings at my house, and it was mainly just chattering and laughing, you know, but so that was very interesting. That was right at the beginning and people were worried about telling their husbands about it or something.

Really? Wow.

Yes because people were really frightened that the women would stop wearing make up, or change, which of-course they did, you know, but um, there was a lot of that going on at that time, which also reflected on the camp as well I think. Because they did have some marriage break ups, I've heard, and problems because of it, but most of the men were so supportive - staying at home and doing everything, weren't they. Yes. But I do know, I've heard that there were partnership and marriage break ups because of it, which is a shame, isn't it?

So what's the purpose of the groups advertised through Spare Rib - to get people to go to Greenham or was it...

It was a women's, what did they call it? No it wasn't to do with Greenham, it was just when all of this was in the air, you know. Nobody mentioned Greenham then. I think it was probably just before. What year was Greenham?

Oh, I'm going to embarrass myself now on the recording...'80.....

2? 3?

I have '83 in my mind.

Yeah, about that, '82, '83, it could have been just before that Spare Rib came out, I don't know. That's for you to find out. I don't know that.

And then, but then was it with that women's group that you first went to...

Yeah.

To Greenham common?

No, no it wasn't with them at all, because that sort of fizzled out after a few weeks. And then I moved to Leamington, that's right, and immediately there was Friends of the Earth, CND, um, Women's Cafe, there were all sorts of things like that there. So um. There was one woman, I can't remember her name, but she was called Victoria something, and she was the mother of one of my daughter's friends, and she said 'If anyone has to go to prison, I'll put myself forward, because I haven't got small children'. And I always remember that - her name was Victoria and she was quite a bit older than me, and I did ask my friend in Leamington - she was not interested anymore, she didn't know, but I thought that was quite amazing. And then it was at the same time as the miner's support thing going on, so I was in - my daughter got arrested - they charged down Whitehall one night on the horses. Did you ever hear about that?

No, I've never heard about that.

On one of the demonstrations, and um, she was picked up by this policeman, very roughly, thrown in the back of the van - I mean she was black and blue, and um, she kept saying 'I'm not doing anything, I'm not doing anything', and he said 'Shut up or I'll plant some drugs on you.'

Oh gosh!

And the rumours had gone along the line of people that Heather had been - that's my daughter, arrested and some other people. My son was there and he said it took him until 10 o'clock at night phoning and talking to different people until he found out where she was, and she was at Bow Street Police Station, and in, actually he managed to get her released. And she never went on any demonstrations again after that - it really - she was black and blue and very frightened. I think, it was a horrible experience, really horrible.

Sounds terrible.

So that made me think how some of the women might have been treated at Greenham, I don't know - I never come across anybody that said that. I think it had its own sort of protection, didn't it really. But that certainly put her off, but that was the miners' support group. We used to have the meetings on a Monday night in

Leamington and the weekend this had all happened, the Saturday and Sunday, so she came to the meeting on the Monday, she didn't know they all knew - they stood up and gave her a standing ovation! Oh it was lovely, actually, but she would never go - never went on a march or anything again after that. No, don't think I would have done either.

Understandably - so frightening, isn't it.

Oh she was a nice middle class girl, and then suddenly flung into the back of a police van, it's not us. Was that being recorded? Sorry - rambling on!

That's okay! It's really interesting to hear about the other political forms of activism that were happening at the same time, because it wasn't happening in a vacuum, was it - Greenham common, so it's quite nice to hear about it.

That's true. The comparison between the women holding the fort for the miners, as well.

Yes.

Yeah. The same sort of women, the same sort of thing.

So when was the first time you went to the camp to visit?

Well I went to Leamington in 1980, so it would be sort of '81 or 82. We used to have a coach out once a month - on a Saturday, I think, so that's how I used to go. That's why most of the people who went like that didn't camp, you know. In-fact when I did my, you know when you're at college if you're doing a degree you have to do a presentation, and I did mine, and because I'm a hoarder, I found the groundsheet from my tent and the back, is it the fly sheet? And it had Wendy Johns CND on it, and I've still got it up in the loft! So when I did the presentation - a quivering mess, I was, so I had this as the backdrop behind me, and I had recordings of Peggy Seeger singing, and um, I think I passed things round for everybody, but I haven't got it now because it got very old and very smelly! (Laughs). Eventually you start throwing things out, don't you. It was a nice crowd, and I think I mentioned in there about Terry Bailey - a folk singer, who sang every night with his friends outside the jail - where the women were, for them, which I thought was a lovely touch, you know. Because I love men, as well, I thought that was such a nice touch. He did live around the corner from me, so I'll have to see if I can track him down, because it would be nice for him to contribute, wouldn't it?

That's be lovely.

They made sure they had music every night. So maybe not many people know about that, and I'm going to hear lots of things that I didn't know about.

That's the lovely thing - that everyone had a different experience and we're learning so many different perspectives.

Oh it would make a wonderful, wonderful film - I've just been to see Peterloo which I urge you to go and see - it must be on in Oxford somewhere.

I'm sure.

Yes, and that had funding like yours, and it is in quite strong Lancashire dialect it's been done as well. Is it Maxine Peake - the actress?

Yes, yes.

She was in it. I thoroughly loved it because I grew up near Manchester, so it was absolutely in our veins when we were at school, but it's really worth going to see.

I'll have to make a note. Can you tell me a little bit - you were talking about music - about your sort of relationship, not necessarily relationship, but your engagement with Peggy Seeger and with folk music and your relations to Greenham, because you were telling me a bit about that before we were reordering. I think it'd be really fascinating to know a bit more about that.

Well I've always sung, and I sung in choirs, you know, always been in choirs, and my foster mother was a pianist and music teacher, and when I when I went to live with them she used to have a lot of people going to practice - singers and violinists and things, and I used to listen outside. And she commented once that I'd go in and I'd sing what I heard somebody singing or what, you know, because I had what they called perfect pitch - I could just memorise it all, you see, and um, so then ultimately I had singing lessons and won a girl's singing scholarship, and was all set to be going to the Royal Northern College of Music, or the Halle Choral Society because of the work I had done, the study, and then my foster parents suddenly upped and moved, so everything went, you know. I'd just got to the arts school, had all this lovely singing and they moved to Ruislip which is near London, and it just broke my heart because it wasn't the north - it was just so different, and they were all frightfully posh, the girls there, and the boys. And I still had this quite strong accent, and it was just me, because I'm like that and I felt about this big, you know. But I soon settled in and married one of them eventually, moved to (inaudible), it was run by (inaudible). So what else would you like to know?

So just a bit more about meeting Peggy Seeger and the role that she played in Greenham common.

Now I did a telephone thing with her - interview with her, and I only met her when she came to Ruskin and she came to The Rover - that's Cowley, amazing place, because they had so much money, and the sports centre and their ballroom and their place you know was incredible, so she did this benefit concert there for Ruskin, so that's when I actually met her, and she said um, she sang a lot of things, and then she said 'Now are there any Greenham women here?' And nobody moved, you know, and she said 'If this had been America there would have been a stampede!' So eventually like three of us put our hands up, and she said 'Come on, come on, you've got to come up and sing with me'. It was wonderful, really nice, I really enjoyed that. Yes. She's a lovely woman actually, really really nice. She lives in Wilmcote, by The Trout, did you know that?

No I didn't know that.

Well she did last time I heard of her.

Do you remember what you sang when you went on?

I'm trying to think what the anthem was.

Was it a Greenham common anthem that had been sung there?

Yes. I can't remember now - the famous Greenham song, that's what we sang - we all held hands, it was lovely. Quite a lot of like minded people there you now.

Because you were telling me she was at Greenham right early on?

Oh yes, right at the beginning. Yes. Yes. I think she's a bit older than me, actually, I think so, and of-course she was backwards and forward to America, because she'd got children there, you know. Yeah. But er, no, of-course I was very keen on folk music and its role in political activism, well you'll see when you read it all through what I'd written about it, so and she and her husband Ewan MacColl, and I don't think he mentioned she co-wrote the, something called The Radio Ballads, which you should be able to listen to, well you can find out about that - you can get access, they may even have it at the Women's Library. The Radio Ballads, and it's about travellers, it'll be about mill workers, it'll be about everything, and they were absolutely incredible - used to be on every Saturday, and she's barely mentioned. She not only sang on them but co-wrote them, but that's what it was like then. You know, yeah.

It's the tragedy of women's history, isn't it.

It is! Isn't it, I know, yeah.

And then the absolute joy of re-finding and rediscovering, and being able to reattribute you know, retrospectively associate that back.

Yeah, I mean there's one bit in there that I wrote which'll make you weep, even when I look at it now it makes me weep, one thing that's written you know about folk music, and also it was um, written a lot - after the industrial revolution, before that it was all about farmers and plough men and all that sort of thing, and then it became - it would have the rhythm of the looms, or the rhythm of the chain makers or something like that would be coming into it, you know, so it evolved you know. Now it's gone gentler again, you know, but no - you'll like reading that.

It sounds really fascinating.

Yeah.

And was there a lot of music at Greenham common, do you remember that?

A lot of singing. A lot of singing. Yeah. Yeah. I don't think people had radios then - in the evenings sort of people would sit and sing, because it's a campfire thing, isn't it. Yeah. And, I forgot - I never thought I'd hear any more about that any more. (Laughs). I hope everybody has kept everything they'd got from there, because as I say there were quite a lot of mainly middle class women, really, educated women - well the ones that I met, you know - it was harder for the working class women really to go on those demos - they'd have to have an husband who was sympathetic as well. It's funny because we were going to go on one of the Aldermaston marches many years ago, when my husband was around, and I'd either just had a baby or was expecting a baby, or was pushing - can't remember, to, of them or something, and one of my friends said to me 'Why didn't' you go, what kept you?' And we couldn't go for some reason, but this Greenham thing really sprang out of that - it was the same sort of people, and that was very much men and women, the Aldermaston marches, which is the first CND with all the famous people in it.

So what did you think about the decision for Greenham common to be all women - in relation to that?

At first I wasn't too happy about it, and then I saw the reasoning behind it. And they got a lot more respect because of it. That policeman said 'They were lovely'. The

main problem there was - this is what people used to say - you don't necessarily need to put this on the interview, really, it's, they used to say that it was mainly very militant lesbians - that people were against anyway then, much more so than now, and that they had tried to take over, because they'd taken over one of the gates, and there was a lot of dope smoking and things like that went on, and um, so everybody saw just that, because the newspaper reports were awful. And so that was a bit of a shame - but you get hundreds of people together and things like that happen. Just mostly nice women, you know. I never remember seeing many children. I never saw anybody with young children in there. There might of been on other occasions, but I don't think they went in - I don't think so. Because there were no toilets, you know, when I come to think of it - there was nothing like that, which is why sensible women - all ethnic women - don't wear trousers, because you can wee anywhere! Looking at Appleby Fair the other night, there were hundreds of women there, and all the gypsy women and all the older women were all in skirts. And my Syrian friend down the road, she's always in a skirt - she's got trousers underneath but you know, you can go for a wee anywhere - like men can. But if you've got to pull trousers down, and especially as she says - a lot of Indian women are very vulnerable at night because they haven't got toilets, you know, and if you ever got a skirt - you know, you can make a little tent around you. I don't remember seeing any washing facilities - but we were going home at night, so it didn't probably, and we took sandwiches and things. Yeah.

Do you remember what particularly motivated you to go to Greenham common to visit?

Well because I knew about it, and um, reading about it and being in CND, which was the original thing - came out of Aldermaston, and we'd been on different rallies in London. Very big rallies we had in London actually, it was amazing, yes. Millions. But it's not as crowded as you'd think. Have you ever been on a demonstration? It's not as bad as you think, imagine walking along the High Street in Oxford - there's plenty of spaces, and also loads of cafes, so you can just nip in and get a coffee, or you can sit down for a while, or walk on a bit longer, and you'll meet somebody you know. I met one of my friends who has got one leg, on his bicycle, his other leg had come off! He'd come up from Glastonbury - you keep seeing people you know, so and then you'd lose the people you were with, and you'd say 'Can you look out for me when I come back - does anyone want a drink?' And then you'd go off and get coffees and things, and teas. No, they were very friendly, very friendly - apart from the miners' one, which did get nasty. Got very nasty, yeah. It sort of put me off as well, because after I'd moved into Leamington, and a little while afterwards, and I realised that, I was too innocent to know what it was, but my phone was obviously tapped and then I kept getting mail that had been opened and interfered with - other people'll tell you that, yes. It was, you know, not very nice, and if you were a woman living on your own

you feel a bit worried then when that sort of thing happens, and you just think I'll leave it to somebody else now. (Laughs). We went to Molesworth as well, that was another camp - have you heard of the Molesworth one?

No I haven't.

Yes my other son went to that one a couple of times, that was um, I can't remember where it was - that was male and women, it was a smaller peace camp, and they had a small one near Oxford at Heyford as well, and um...

That was also protesting the presence of nuclear weapons?

Yes that was a sort of Greenham, yes - at that time. I don't know about other parts of the country, I don't know whether anything went on there at all, do you?

I don't know, in terms of camping.

No no. If I think of things I'll note them down. If I see you again I can tell you.

Do you remember what the atmosphere was like when you went to visit?

Lovely, really nice. Really very nice. Which it is, when you get all women together like that, it is lovely, isn't it? Yeah. A lot of laughter, a lot of singing you know, a lot of rude jokes! It was just nice because there weren't any men at that particular time. It's like women anyway get together and with all their friends, but you've still got men around at other times. So it was quite nice to be away from them for a little while, but not permanently! And I wish my son could have come up - I'm trying to think how old he was. He's 63 now, he would have been about 18 or 20, something like that. Yeah, and he went with another friend called Gordon, who we still know, and he lives in Wales. He went to school with both my boys, you know, and they were there which was lovely. And then they did go back afterwards, I know, and take food and wood - things like that, the men, so they got - a lot of men did that - supported around the perimeter, you know. And gave people lifts home you see - people sometimes wanted to go home and get washed, see their families. But it was a very interesting bit in the project about a girl - I can't refer - Richardson was her mother's name, she was an MP, um, she was at school - she went to the camp while she was at school, and I think she was in the middle of doing G...whatever it would have been then.

GCSE.

Yes, and um, so she dropped out of school to do that you see, and they wouldn't have her back. There was a big fuss about that, so of-course Ruskin embraced her and

finished her education for her there. I can't remember what her name was, but it's about that in there, somebody Richardson, yeah. So there were lots of little stories like that. I mean you'll gather hundreds of them. How many interviews have they done so far?

When we were originally recruited for the project I think there's ten volunteers plus the two organisers, and I think we're all aiming to do a minimum of ten interviews each, so I suppose that's over a hundred interviews ideally.

I must remember to ask my friend about the policeman - if we could have his phone number.

Yes.

That'd be nice, wouldn't it.

Yes. When you were visiting, what did you sense the relations were like with the men that were there - the authority, the police, the soldiers and the women?

Well I didn't see any of the 'men' men around and the policemen were all - I didn't see any violence. They were all jolly like the daffodils, they were all very young as well, they were like our sons, sort of thing. Because there were quite a lot of older women there as well because they could spare the time, you know, and so I mean they did far more than their fair share in roughing it and sleeping out. And it was harder for them to give up all their luxury and comfort, and um, yes it was not very nice living rough like that, and rotten food and everything, so there were an awful lot of older women, I did notice. You'll really find that with the interviews - a certain age!

And did you participate or see any organised protest happening when you were there?

No. Not at all. Except I think one of those is circling the camp - walking round.

Embrace the Base?

Yeah.

Where everyone held hands?

Yeah, that would be the nearest to it. I think it's a housing estate now, isn't it - or something?

I was talking to - the person I spoke to last week said there is a housing estate there, but also the common now is a big expansive open space, there's still a couple of the towers there.

Sort of memorial - monuments?

I think they kept them as reminders, but she said it's very strange because it's this open expansive...

I wouldn't want to go and see it. I've written a bit about Watership Down, which you'll read in there.

I saw a little bit about it.

Oh you read it. And it's funny because they had the film on over Christmas, it was rubbish actually - the Watership Down film, but they were having all this housing development and having to move off - they were having a similar time themselves - being disrupted because of something. I thought the film was awful! Probably must be other books written about it - must be.

Yes, absolutely. Um, as somebody who is, um, actively engaged in activism and music, what role do you think that art plays in activism?

What?

What role does art play in activism - in a very broad sense, fine art or music?

Well I've written about that extensively in there, because I think it's interwoven. The folk music is mainly women that have carried it on - it's something they can do while they're working, it fits in with what they're doing and I think they had it, yeah - there were a lot - I think women have always sung - when they're nursing children - they've had more time for it, haven't they? I mean there's one song in there called Pobbity Pobbity Knock, which is the noise of the looms gives the rhythm, you know, so a lot of them are based on the rhythms of how they're working. Like in the Black Country they have these big forges that go thump, thump, and that rhythm is in a lot of their songs. Black Country people are very interesting, very, very interesting. You didn't see Peaky Blinders, did you?

I did, yes.

Thank god for that. Everybody looks at me blankly!

Oh really?

You know it's from a true story?

No I didn't.

Did you see all of it?

I've seen the first bit of it, the first season and a bit.

Well do you want to switch this off while I tell you about it, because it's not to do with this project! So it's nice to find someone else.

Yes go on.

They were Romanies - one was (inaudible). And one someone else and they were called up for the First World War, so in the beginning of the film you see them all in their caravans and wagons, and I missed the first two or three, and they went to war - they went to the First World War and they came back completely damaged and really damaged because of what they've seen - well you know what it was like. And they started to act up and get very, very violent - very nasty. So that programme wasn't just about - you know it was about a lot of things, but then they got involved with gambling and things like that, and there's some very strong women in it as well - amazing. And then they got masses of money - they became very very wealthy, and they there were all these rivalry fights. I didn't see all the last season, but he'd got involved with the mafia, because some of the cousins had gone to America and made a lot of money. So the new series which is starting I don't know when, is how they are now, I'm not going to tell you what happened when - half way through, because it'll spoil it, but there are some amazing shots of real Gypsy weddings in proper wagons - going along the cobblestone streets, and then the burning of the caravan and everything, and every now and again - I can't remember his name - Cillian..

Cillian, that's it.

Gorgeous, wasn't he!

(Laughs)

Every now and then he sort of, he goes wild, he goes back to where their site was, they light fires and they revert to what they used to be, and talk about it. But a lot of people missed all of that - they just saw it as a gangster thing. Oh it was amazing! I

can't remember the name of the woman in it - gosh she was incredible. She sang a couple of times in it as well, earlier on. There was a lot of sex in it! Very explicit, wasn't it! But the woman who ran that big pub, gosh she was amazing. And they had Tom Waits singing as well. Do you know Tom Waits? A really amazing American folk singer with a really deep rough voice - you ought to listen to some of his music, it's amazing. Yes they used a lot of his songs in the background. There was everything I loved in that, you know. Yeah.

You've inspired me to go home and watch it now - watch the rest of it!

Do you have a library of films? We had a lot of videos in Ruskin.

Everything's sort of online now, so you can access things digitally.

Oh so you could get the box set and watch them? Take your time over them?

Yes.

Oh that would be a good thing to do, wouldn't it! Because the archives at Ruskin were down in the basement. I have privilege to have that - to use that little room, and it was just lots and lots of LPs, a few books and magazines and a really grotty little record player - like dansette sort of thing, record player. It was just amazing, absolutely amazing. I was very privileged. I don't know where it's gone, because they would have moved it when they sold Ruskin's building to Exeter College, so I don't know what they've done with it.

Oh, I didn't realise Exeter owned that now.

Owned that building.

Right.

Well Ruskin didn't have a lot of money, and buildings never come up for sale in Oxford, and this woman, who I actually happen to know, because I used to sing with her, she was from Warwick University - I think she was the principle. She was sent in - I think she was head hunted to go in, because everyone was going to be against selling Ruskin, so that's what she was there to engineer that, and the only they raised - I've forgotten how many millions, paid for them to build, well they'd already got the place at Headington, build this wonderful student accommodation, luxury apartments that they rent out and it's beautiful down there. Um, it was the right thing to do actually, the only thing is that Exeter promised we would always have a room there - for us, the alumni, to be able to go in, and that's still our common room, but there's no

sign of that - nothing's happened. But it was lovely in that building. Yeah. And I met lots of famous people, John Prescott came in once and spent the day with us - do you know he is so nice, he's absolutely lovely. Very, very sexy - which is strange actually, you wouldn't think it, would you? Absolutely a lovely man. He's also dyslexic, which is not well known, so don't put that - I could just tell, the struggles he had when he went there, and then he went on to Hull university and did other degrees. But he learnt to deep sea dive so that he could support the seamen's union.

Oh!

Amazing person. Absolutely amazing. Really incredible. Yeah, and he spent the day with us, which was lovely. And they'd found his old reports, were reading them out and everything, and they were saying, what is it - a 'bloated plu-ta-teria' - is that the word I'm looking for? What expletive does that mean? Somebody had written about him. Used to get people like Colin Thaw used to pop in. Lots and lots of nice people used to pop in because it was very radical in there you know - very nice. Anyway, I'm digressing.

So interesting - it's easy to do, isn't it.

Yes.

Um, maybe we could talk a little bit about - you mentioned in passing that some of the media hadn't been very kind in their presentation of Greenham. Is that - do you think that was representative of the media as a whole - how they were responding to Greenham?

I really don't know. I'm not really sure.

But just in your experience of what you came into contact with at the time?

It was just some of the things you read in the papers, and I didn't sort of go into that very much you know. I suppose it depends which paper, doesn't it?

Of-course.

I must go to the loo.

Yes do.

Shall I leave everything here?

Yes.

You can sit and read my book.

Lovely, I will, I will. Hello again, we're back in.

They won't want to know!

To know all the details! (Laughs). Has your relationship to nuclear weapons changed since visits there camp? We haven't really spoken about nuclear weapons much.

Well obviously I'm still very much against them, yes. Yeah. And er, and also particularly because my best friend is married to a Japanese man - it's pure coincidence that they lived next door to me in Leamington, because my daughter in law is Japanese, and I met so many Japanese people at that time, so I've got an affinity with what they went through, you know. And how they are at the moment, which is appalling. I mean they're not having children. They've got a whole population of mainly older people now. Whether it's something from the effect of the bomb which has affected their psyche, but they're just not having children like they used to. It's sort of like when I met Gina's grandparents, you could feel this sort of terrible sadness, I mean they went through a dreadful thing didn't they? Then they had the tsunami, as well, yeah and er, but they're lovely people. I think it's awful - we're either going to blow ourselves up, or we're going to be obliterated according to the news. I feel sorry for young people, I worry about my grandchildren, you know - what are they doing? Yeah. It's just, yeah. I really don't know. And I've got a great grandson as well. How old are you, do you mind me asking?

No I'm 25..6, 25.

Same age as my granddaughter - one's 25 and one's 26. Yeah. No, I do worry about it all, and also I've got this terrible feeling of powerlessness. Okay I don't take any medicines. I don't go to the doctors or anything like that, I'm a vegetarian, but I do take some supplements and I spent about half an hour yesterday in the chemist trying to find something that wasn't in plastic bottles. Because huge plastic bottles everywhere, so the ones I take for my eyes - they're made in Oxfordshire, and they're made from 'tagitus' - 'tagitus' is it? Dandelion. They're sort of like - well (inaudible) stuff is all like that, and they just come in a bubble pack, a bubble thing, and um but everything else - it's all huge, terrifying. I've got this thing about people going litter picking at weekends. Instead of going for walks looking at snowdrops, and things, do something while you're walking you know. But they go on all the beaches apparently, I think that's very worthwhile, isn't it.

Yes. Definitely..

I mean one woman, she'd filled fifteen bags - bin bags, and it was everywhere - all over the beaches. What did I buy the other day? Cotton buds, and I thought I'll never find cotton buds because my daughter said there are some with wooden things now. So I did find some - Superdrug do them with wooden, but they're in a plastic box! So I've dispensed them into a pretty little pot - fancy jam pot, and put them in that with just one poking out, which I thought was quite clever. But I don't feel we can do much about it now. That's how I feel. Yeah.

Sounds like you've been a really committed activist throughout your whole life..

Well not so much an activist, but personally doing what I can, you know. And I think that's a lot because I'm a Christian, so I've always championed the underdog, and because I was very much the underdog myself, you know, sort of - yes, I've always been on the side of people like that... being fostered and not very happily, I think that's what it is, always championed the underdog. And of-course my parents who brought me up weren't like that at all, you see. I think they thought they'd got alien. And unfortunately - 'course they didn't call it dyslexia in those days, it was called being educationally subnormal - they used to say - if you couldn't read or write very well. I didn't learn to read until...

What an unkind way of describing someday.

I didn't learn to read properly until I was 8, and of-course I never stoped then. It was amazing, but um, and they were very academic, and my brother - as I call him, in that family, he went to Manchester grammar school and he went to Cambridge, and he's an MA. He's nearly 92 and he still plays chess, he doesn't do computers or anything like that, I'm pleased to know it actually because he's so clever. He won't have anything to do with it, I don't think he's even got a mobile phone. He plays chess with his friend who shared the same landing when he was at Cambridge - they called them landings then, you know, with um, Bob Hattersley and Richard Attenborough - whose father was a don at Cambridge. So he still plays chess with Bob, and they have this letter comes backwards and forwards every fortnight. I think it's lovely. Quite a gentle way, but he's really mellowed as he's got older, he was horrible to me! Foul! But that was, I think it was just me because I felt like an alien there - I think that's why I've always gone to the underdog side of people you know - the poorer people.

It's interesting that you link your activism to being Christian, because the lady I interviewed on Friday was a Quaker and she was...

Oh they were very much into it...

And that was precisely why she went.

Absolutely.

Did you get a sense when you were at Greenham, or sort of around that time, that religion played quite a big part in activism?

No, because I very rarely bring it up in conversation, because of - just because of - and of-course the Quaker thing comes into it, no it's not anything I normally talk about it, because so few people are Christians now. It's strange, isn't it.

And at the camp, at the time...

Never heard of anything. I mean they might have had a little service, or a visiting minster. I don't know, I wonder if it did feature there. It would be interesting...

It would be interesting to know...

It would, wouldn't it. I would have thought the local churches, or maybe they don't want to get involved in politics. Could be, couldn't it.

I know that some of the local Quakers set up - almost pay as you go showers, where you put coins in to have a hot shower - they built them in the halls, the Quaker halls, so that the women could go down and have a shower. So I know the Quakers locally seemed to be quite supportive.

Was this in Oxford?

No, this was at Greenham .

Oh at Greenham. No I didn't know about that.

At the time - I think the Quakers were quite active in being as helpful as they could, but I don't know much about - it would be interesting to follow that up.

It would be, wouldn't it. Well there's the Quaker's Meeting House here in Oxford you could perhaps speak to somebody there about it, couldn't you?

Yes, absolutely. Um, is there a moment or an emotion or a picture that particularly sums up Greenham for you, when you think about it?

Well I love the policemen with the daffodils - it's my favourite. Wouldn't it be lovely if he turns out to be my friend's father or father in law or something?

That would be such a lovely full-circle.

Actually I'll ask her to take a photograph of him, send it to him, because it would be nice, wouldn't it. I go to an art group, and they're all terribly excited about this because I never miss the class, but I missed it because of this happening.

Ah thank you.

Not today - later on, and I rang my friend who has a mobile phone, who lives in Oxford, because they're not people from Banbury that go to this - they're from all over, and I said, 'Oh, can you tell Rachel sorry I'm not going to be there today, I won't be having lunch with you, because I'm being interviewed about Greenham.' Oh she said 'Hang on', she put it on loud something for everyone to hear! (Laughs). They were all very excited about it.

Were they involved?

Don't think so. But tomorrow when I see them they'll all want to know how I get on, and I'll say 'Was anybody else here involved?' Except for my friend's father or father in law.

Well we'd love to talk to anybody who was involved and interested to speak about it.

I'll ask Ian what he thought about things - my son - and I can make a note of that. Yes. But um, no I think um, they went to Molesworth as well which was - I'm not quite sure where it was. We went there by coach, coaches took people you see, that's the thing...

Do you know who organised the coaches?

Probably the local CND groups, which there were you see - we used to go to CND meetings, we used to go to Friends of the Earth meetings, you know - for a long, long time. In-fact when we moved off our boat and went to Banbury, the first thing my eldest son, who is a Buddhist by the way, the first thing we do to make friends is we joined CND and we joined Friends of the Earth, and we saw the same people at each one! And they became all our friends. He's a Buddhist - proper Buddhist, he's a monk, and he speaks um, quite a good bit of Japanese, because his wife was Japanese - she's sadly gone to heaven. Er he speaks Cantonese and Mandarin, so

he spends quite a few months there every year, not in Hong Kong, a place called Lantau Island - I don't know if you know anything about that? It's a wonderful island with a huge gold Buddha on it - all the tourists go there to see it and um, so that's his main monastery, where he was actually ordained. But he does a lot of chanting, because he was a singer as well - both my sons were choristers, and so he does a lot of amazing chanting in these different languages. And he says it's terribly similar to Christianity in a lot of ways, you've got people eating, there'll be something to drink, there'll be a table - like an altar sort of thing, and cloths over, he said it's so similar the world over - all these different religions. I've noticed it when I've been to Hindu-y things, it's all terribly similar. Yeah. (Laughs). One of my aunts - I did have a couple of nice people in the family that brought me up, she used to say to me 'In our father's house there are many mansions', she used to say, which is true. So that's what he does, I had a card from him yesterday. They take weeks to get to me because he's in Thailand now, giving some lectures in a caves complex somewhere - can't wait to hear that! Yeah, he does quite a lot of lectures out there. He's, he's going to be 65 when he gets back - he'll get his pension at long last. He's got a cottage in Wales, oh, um, Newcastle Emlyn - do you know Wales at all? It's lovely, very Welsh speaking there as well. He's got a nice little cottage there. He's coming home at the beginning of the summer before it gets too hot.

Your family sounds just fascinating!

Actually they are, I've not even touched on it - we'd be here for months if I told you about my real family that I've found, my own proper family, and everything like that. My daughter did all the research, it's just incredible - on family history. Oh god we've got the most - I've got one set of papers that I've got to go down to the Imperial War Museum with - one of my real aunts who was captured by the Germans during the war, she was teaching there in France. Because they were teaching nuns, had professions. I've got a tape recording of her telling me about her experiences which is just for the family, you know, and all these papers, obviously somebody at her convent must have had them all printed out for her, and the originals - the newspapers cuttings about these nuns coming back, they were swapped with German prisoners at the end of the war. It took nine weeks to get back to England - through some circuitous route. I've got pictures of them and they look so thin and pale, these poor sisters, so that's another amazing story. But I'm going to take the originals down to the Imperial War museum, they're beginning to break up a bit, and I can keep copies and they can have the originals. Oh no, but you wouldn't believe it - we are, my real family were incredible, they've got everything in it. Whether it's because I've had to discover them bit by bit, or they gradually came upon me. It's my daughter that did it, because I didn't even have my birth certificate until I was 18. I had to get married with assumed names and things like that, and it's now it's easy - if you said to me 'I was adopted', I could say 'Go on the Internet, you'll find somebody

that evening', which is fatal because I've seen it happen. That's how easy it is now. She had to do it by looking through the records, parish records and Creed Books, which were enormous workhouse books like this - which you can go in and see if you go to um, Somerset House, or places like that in London - Creed Records they're called and um, they're huge and as children were entered into these places, homes or taken in off the street, all in copperplate writing - all about the, what religion they were, where they'd come from, and then a few days later it'll say 'Discharged back to mother', and then a bit further 'Found on the street with other and several other - all back in again'. You could write millions of novels from them. They're just incredible to look at. The one I was in was called The Waifs and Strays - that's emotive, is't it! (Laughs).

It's very Dickensian.

I know! My son and I were, I said 'Let's form a folk group and call ourselves The Waifs and Strays!' It was Dickensian then, before the war, it really was, and the fact that somebody could just pluck me out of somewhere like that and call me what they wanted without any paperwork. I mean there were so many families. I met a lady in Banbury one day - she must have felt some affinity, because I was waiting for my coffee in Debenhams and she said 'Let me buy you your coffee', which is sweet of her, so I said 'Thank you', so I thought I'll go and sit with her. And she looked at me and said 'Now I was fostered' she said, now whether she'd pick something up off me, I don't know, because I'd never met her before. She was about my age, and she was one of twelve children - all taken in somewhere in a village in Oxfordshire, all in to a 'Tog-H' (spelled phonetically) Children's home, which I'd never heard of - that used to be something to do with the church, didn't it - 'Tog-H'? It was funded by a man who found a girl, I think he was a minister - bleeding to death after having been given a bad abortion, and it made him set up this thing - awful things happened in those days. I think they're called - and she was one of twelve children from one family. All just taken in, because there was no money, I suppose. Yeah. That's why I liked family history. Fascinating. Anyway, you should tell me more about you, actually - I'm sure you've got just as interesting a life.

I don't think I do in comparison!

Well you've only just started, haven't you.

Well talking of legacy, maybe a nice way to end up talking about Greenham is maybe you could explain why you think it's important we remember Greenham for subsequent generations? Why is this project worthwhile, why are you here?

It's so important, it's as important as the match girls' strike and the miners' strike, any of those things. And um, the Welsh women who went on the beaches with the red flannel petticoats, you know - you grew up with that did you at school, things like that. So women have been amazing through history, haven't they - doing things like that. And there were one or two women soldiers, weren't there, who went to war - I can't remember their, I read an amazing book about one of them, I can't remember her name, and they never found out until they were bring laid out - when they died, you know, that they were men, or women or whatever, you know.

Wow.

I think women have always been very strong on that front, I think it's built into us, because of nurturing for the next generation, you know. It's like I said I'm worried sick about my children and grandchildren and great grandchild, I don't hear men talking in quite the same way about it - I haven't heard my sons say anything like that, actually.

It feels very personal?

Yeah, I don't think they take it quite as personally, because I think probably our role, naturally, in nature, is to nurture the children in the hearth, and you know - that sort of thing, you know, yes. I was just talking to Charlie outside, because he was in a children's home as well, he's always there every day in his corner, you know, and he was in one of the Church of England children's home, and he said, he's only 82, as well - he's younger than me, I said 'I'm more frightened now than when the war started' - when we were both about nine, because everybody was so frightened, all the adults - the fear everywhere, we were in Scotland then and he was saying he remembers sleeping under a big iron table - they were called Anderson shelters, they were made, and like the whole family would be underneath that with a bucket and bits and pieces of food, and you could be there for several days while the bombs were going on. And I said I'm feeling that fear now that I used to feel then. The way things are going, and he was saying the same. Yes. And er, I never thought it would end up like this, I thought things would get better, but I don't think they really have, have they? Unless we get a bit of divine intervention or something!

So do you think we've learnt from things like Greenham common?

Um, well that I don't know - we'll have to wait and see what comes out of all these interviews, what people say. Um, I've certainly learnt, but necessarily from that - from the whole thing, sort of doing women's studies as well - women teach you a lot. That's a fascinating course to do, actually (gasps), covers everything, absolutely

everything - really, really good. I'm so glad I chose that. But you're doing English Literature?

I am now, but I did my masters in Women's Studies, here.

Is that how you came to get this interviewing?

In a very kind of broad, round way - so I worked with one of the organisers on a project about Suffrage, and we went round and interviewed women about kind of their responses to it today, but we were put together because she's a Theatre maker, and she's very interested in staging women's experiences that have been lost or covered up in history, so we both had that shared interest, and then were put together by the theatre to go and do that project together. So from working there she's then brought me in to this one.

Oh, I've got a woman friend, in fact I ought to ring her this week, who does plays about the canals, and takes them round, you see. Yes. I've got to ring her this week about something. It's very interesting the story of the women on the boats - who took over from the men, who went away, that's another - it's only because I'm older - I'm not particular clever, I've just got all this junk inside me. It gathers moss, you know, as you get the experiences, you know.

But I suppose you're open to it, so you hear it and you see it and you can share it with different people. There are lots of people who would have heard or experienced, or come into contact with those women's experiences that for them it wouldn't have been important, and they wouldn't have remembered them, you know.

Oh I see what you mean.

So the fact that you took them onboard and are sharing them with other people, that's incredible.

I think it's because of my funny upbringing, and the age that I last saw my mother, and not knowing where I'd been taken and why. I used to do counselling for people that had been adopted or fostering, being reunited, which is a whole huge subject, loaded - you know, so I did it for about 15 years with people at NORCAP - National Organisation for Adoptees and - oh I can't remember what it is, and this thing that came very much up when we used to talk about it, and my niece has got two adopted children - I was telling her and she said 'They're always listening', and that was always me - I'd always be listening at the top of the, because they'd been taken away from their mother and remembered her, and didn't know why and all that stuff, but I was always listening, and I'll never forget one day, I was listening to my mother - as I call

her, talking to her sister about me and saying how much she hated me, in-fact she said 'I detest her' (laughs). I mean it's awful isn't it.

Cruel actually.

She was one of those, dour is not the word, but very very harsh Welsh women - you know, they can be, can't they. Quite sort of bitter. I'd like to meet her - if I could meet her in heaven I'd like to say 'Why did you hate me, what had I done wrong?' And I'd like to meet my real mother and say 'Why was I taken away from you?' But yeah, I woke up the other morning and I - because I was thinking about this Greenham thing, and my husband - we were divorced before he died, but we were separated for about 5 years and we remained friends, because I was living on the boats, and he used to lend me his car and things like that, and I used to meet him about once a week and go for a drink with him - I mean we'd got three children in common, you know, and he was a poet as well, a published poet, a very brilliant man. And I woke up the other morning and thought 'Oh I wish I could talk to Michael, I wish he was here, I'd love to tell him what Jean is doing, or what my son is doing - his son as well, I'd love to be able to tell him what everybody is doing in the family'. I don't know why I suddenly thought of that, you know, because he's been gone a long time, but it's because all this is swirling around at the moment, you know - all this nonsense is going on, you know. Yeah. But you had a happy childhood, did you?

I did, well my parents did split up so I don't see my father.

Not at all?

Not at all, no, no, but I, my mum and her sister, um, had been very supportive and very caring and made me feel very safe and loved, so I feel like it was difficult as it always is when your parents separate, but happy. And now I'm very happy, and I think a lot of that is from the support and the love that they gave me when I was younger.

And did you find doing Women's Studies helped you as well? Because there's so much - I did, I found that very useful, especially when we had our discussions, you know, I found it very very helpful - listening to other people's experiences.

Absolutely. To be around like minded people who um, who see the value in - or share your values and your interest and belief in women and their ability to do incredible things.

I think we started up, I think there were about twenty that started the course, and I think we ended up with about seven or eight - people drifted off. But one of them she was a firewoman.

Wow!

Jo - she was just amazing, and she became, not the mother figure, but the leader, she was strong, you know, I remember once somebody had slipped on the stairs and was in danger of throwing me back with her, and she came and she grabbed hold of me, picked me up and moved me. She was amazing. She went back to do her MA afterwards - I didn't want to go back, you know. No. Do you get good food where you are?

It's mixed. I'm vegan now. I used to be vegetarian, and that was okay, but now being vegan - they're not very good at accommodating.

Not yet.

Not yet. They're getting better slowly.

Well I've always been vegetarian, but all my most of my family are vegan now, in-fact my daughter she used to really - I've never liked meat, never wanted meat, but she used to be a really big meat eater, and she suddenly became vegan last year, and I was a bit worried, but she's a marvellous cook and now both her children - the 25 year old and - they're all vegan down there. We had a vegan Christmas! (Laughs).

That'll make - when Becca hears this, who is one of the organisers, she's a vegan as well, and she'll be loving that we've managed to get to veganism.

It crops up everywhere, doesn't it!

Yeah.

My son - my eldest son, that's Ian, Ian and I love food, we love cakes and we love cheese and cream, and he said he can't imagine going to somebody's house and somebody's made a lovely cake and not being able to have it, so we're sticking with that, because we love cooking, you know. So I do have two eggs a week, but I love cooking anyway. I bet some of it's awful, some of the food. But we had a lovely Christmas. But her husband eats whatever she's cooked because she's such a wonderful cook, but he's got a shelf at the top of the big fridge - it's one of these high ones, with a cloth over it, with - she cooked him a ham and a small beef thing at Christmas, and I couldn't even stand the smell of it in the kitchen.

I'm exactly the same.

And she's cooked all of that for him, and it's on the top shelf covered with a cloth - so he's out there making his sandwiches! (Laughs). I don't think he'd ever change - he's half Jamaican and I think he'd be losing his manhood if he became a vegan.

It's ever so tied down isn't it - vegetarian and veganism and masculinity, when you start to unpick it it's so interesting.

Isn't it. Yeah, it's, in-fact I went into WH Smith's in Banbury the other day, and I don't suppose there would be that many, well I didn't think there would be many - all the shelves were vegetarian cookery, but I've never seen so many - and the magazines, vegan food, and it's become very very big. And of-course it's a lot cheaper as well, a lot cheaper and a lot healthier. But no, I have a portion of cheese and I have some eggs, and I do like making cakes. Gina's not a vegan - my half Japanese granddaughter, but because she's been around vegetarianism half her life she tends to do that, and when she comes to me she comes with a big plastic carrier bag full of food for me - she always comes via Marks', I said stay where you are a minute, at the gate - there was a lovely wicker basket, and I put all the food in the basket, put a cloth over it and took a picture, and said 'Oh grandma, what big eyes you've got! (Laughs). Yeah, but she's a lovely cook as well - she's the one that used to work here. She's gorgeous. Yeah. We, I never talk about politics with her at all - I do with the others a lot, but she's got her own place in London now - both my granddaughters have, they've got good jobs. It worries me because I can't see them having families at this rate. I said to her the other day 'I had three children when I was your age, you'd better hurry up, you know', because she'd make a lovely mother. I think because she was an only child maybe I don't know - maybe it's part of this Japanese thinking in her mind, I don't know. But yeah. Oh you must have children, they're wonderful - and grandchildren, they're something else, you know. And you've got so much more time to teach them and read poetry and things like that. My daughter posts - every year for Armistice, she puts a picture of me, and they call it 'Wendy's Words of Wisdom' - I only see it when it's done. They put a picture of me at some stage in my life, and I will read one of the war poems - I do that every year, you see, so I wanted to make sure I do something - what is the date of the anniversary? Because I want to put that nice picture of me on the Greenham day, on the website you see - for everyone to see, and I'll think of words to put in it.

11th November.

11th November, right, might even have time to write a poem. 11th November. And is anything happening? Is there going to be anything in London or on the television?

I imagine there will be - nothing's coming up immediately now, I suppose it's still a long way, isn't it.

Yes. Or maybe they'll have regional. There must be something.

I'm sure, I'm sure.

Absolutely. Greenham.