

Lynette Edwell

So Lynette, could you maybe just tell us like how you got to be involved in the peace movement? What was the starting point.

Yes. My role is slightly different to most others. I was - please make yourselves comfortable. Erm, I was a member of, a very minor member of Newbury Campaign Against Cruise Missiles, which was an ordinary CND group. And I was just about getting interested in the issue of cruise. I'd been very active in the KC 135 campaign, which lasted four months, in which the whole community of Newbury was involved, and we succeeded in getting the tanker aircraft transferred from Greenham to Fairford. But cruise missiles were different. And I felt particularly that we had been cheated. We'd got rid of the tanker. And now here we are with cruise missiles. Once again, you know, this is an American military machine that's coming here without the consent, I thought, of our neighbours, or of our community. I also felt living in Newbury, we were then, with cruise missiles, we were then being confronted with SS-20s. In the event of a war triggered off, there's Europe with SS-20s coming to my town, cruise missiles allegedly melting into the countryside, all of them being fired at Europe. I didn't think anything was going to be left of my town. I didn't think anything was going to be left of Europe. I didn't think the matter had been properly debated. I didn't think we'd had consultation. What we in Newbury had, which has now been forgotten, is we had a lovely lovely little document dropped to our door by Newbury council telling us virtually about the benefits of cruise missiles, which you can see in my files at Berkshire records office. I found out later, that's all been funded by General Dynamics. Imagine that, a defence company actually using their propaganda and getting the local council delivering it. And that's exactly what was happening. Nobody was questioning it. The town was far more interested in the trade and the prestige the Americans would bring. During the Second World War, the Americans came to Newbury, they were generous. They were heroic, going up those ridiculous gliders or being absolutely eliminated when the Normandy landing took place, but there you go, erm and leaving behind outstanding friendships. Many of the girls married Americans, and they've kept up those friendships. And they felt all this was very threatened when we started to object to nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons at Greenham.

So when did you arrive at Greenham? What year was it that you?

I moved here in 1978. Women arrived on a walk from Welford in September 1981.

Is that when you went to Greenham?

I'd been to Greenham over the KC 135 campaign!

Yeah.

But we didn't protest there. We protested in the town. But I knew about Greenham because that's where the KC135s were coming.

Yeah, I mean at the camp itself. I'm just trying to,

Yeah, okay. Well in September 1981, because my children on holiday and dilly dallied, I didn't catch the main camp - the main marchers, men, women and children as they came into town, I was left at the starting gate pub, waiting for Helen John and her little boy who were having tea and cookies at Welford. And that was the first time I met Helen John, and we've been friends till her death.

Right.

And so we then my children just wanted to go home. But I was down to help with the salads. So I went along, met everybody who were very, very tired. They were staying at the methodist hall. Think it's the methodist hall. It's in Northbrook Street and the church hall there. The idea is they stayed for a day or two and went home. And there were just remarkable women there. But there were too - you know, I was too tired the day I was there to do much. But apparently after I left, they got together and decided they would walk through the town. Nobody contacted me so I didn't know about it. So they walked through the town the next day, up to Greenham carrying banners. They went to the main gate and there was nobody there. So they try to leave a letter. I believe - I wasn't there. They tried to make communication with the base. Nobody's there. Nobody's interested. So they just set up. This is when members of Newbury Campaign Against Cruise Missiles like Sue Thompson arrived, helped with tents and food and lighting and wood and enabled women to settle down for a temporary stay. And that was when the liaison between our Newbury group and the camp started. So several of the women who felt they could be away from their families set up camp there and asked if they could have a debate in parliament on cruise missiles. And they were completely ignored. So then there was a visible presence at the camp, which grew and grew. And there was a lot of polythene. It was like a sort of squatters camp but very well organised - it was men and women. And if you were going along the main road, you're invited to toot, you're invited to come and have a coffee. They had a hostess for the day. You put a little contribution and you could stay for lunch, and it was all very nice and the camp was quite popular, but nobody really knew about it. Nobody's interested.

And were you staying there then?

No, no, no, no. I was staying here. Women were staying with me.

Okay.

I had small children. I was I was on my own then. And I also worked.

Yeah.

So women came and slept here.

What did you do?

I was a journalist.

Oh right, okay.

So erm, women stayed with me - this is my friendships with Helen John and Sjöö and all the early women. So I knew it was going on because it was all held here.

How did that work then? So they were living at camp and they'd come and stay with you for periods?

If you want a bath, if you wanted to use the telephone.

Oh, I see. Okay, great.

If you wanted to type anything you had to come here, we had nowhere else in town.

And was it in this house?

Yes, yes!

Oh wow!

So I had so many people you never knew, you know, just women just brought sleeping bags and slept in here, slept in the dining room slept - we put the children in one room they'd sleep upstairs. So well. It was very nice.

Did the children like that then?

Oh, they loved it! Yeah, I don't know if they do now - my youngest was very involved, because she was about five.

Right.

So and I was on my own then, I wasn't with my husband. So. And then there were problems at camp because there were young men there. And, shall I just say they weren't fitting in? And they decided, especially the lot that came around here decided we'd go women only.

I would be interested to know about that decision to make it women only.

I'm going to tell you!

Yeah, in terms of when you say not fitting in, what do you mean?

Yeah, well, the men that stayed - I'm not talking about the original men from Wales, because I didn't know them. But the men that stayed tend to be out of work men who were just dossing around which you got at other peace camps. They also, you know, there's drinking and general feeling was that when business got serious, and they were doing non-violent actions, they didn't want to be doing it with these men cos they didn't trust them. So they decided that they wanted to be women only. It was Helen John and Sjö - who else? Lynn Jones, quite a few of them. Now, this split the camp, this is in 82, there was an action coming up, there was the sewage pipe action, which was the first blockade in March. And then there was also the Dragon Festival, where it's going to be a family event. Sewage pipe action was the first time women were arrested for obstruction. They were getting a bit hard up for reasons to actually detain you and make an example of you. So obstruction was a major one. I wasn't involved in that, but people I know were. So that was the sewage pipe action. So then, at the Dragon Festival, it is decided they'd go on and be women only. So it was a lovely family festival flying kites and we all enjoyed it. And then they said, because Helen said to me, 'We're going to go women only and CND is not going to support us.' And I said, 'No, they're not, our group vote. But I will.' She said, 'Well, what we need to know is who's going to support us, you know, because we're going to do it.' So what happened is that from that March of '82, various groups all over - whether they were still with their CND group or independently - became what was known as Greenham support groups, they fundraised for us, they were us. But also whatever we needed they brought, like sleeping bags, basic food and wood. But what we also needed was to get the newsletters out. And then in the very early days of '82 Sundays were a very special day. Because I never went, but they would have speakers Sunday afternoon, all sorts of very earnest people came and spoke and discussed. And that was a really good focal place for working women, because if they could get Sunday off, come to Greenham, and that's how Greenham was starting as a place of debate. On a Saturday, women, especially Southampton women, will go up and down the shopping centre, getting petitions and things. I now regard petitions as totally useless, unless you're doing one on the internet and getting thousands. But in those days, we had very worthy petitions and you explained to every single person what it was about. That was when I first met Di McDonald, because my daughter could not believe the triplets, three identical - in fact, they're two identical and one sister, but she could not believe it. So we had to go round the town, you know, following these three children to make sure they were real. So that's when I got to know Di McDonald. But it was sort of different activities on a Saturday and Sunday, as I saw it, I would be - I wasn't involved. But on the Saturday they'd go into the town. On the Sunday, people were invited to go the camp. So the camp grew. But nobody knew anything about us. We weren't newsworthy, and things were starting to get rough.

How did the men react to being, well I suppose they were there as ...

They were furious! Sulking in tantrums. So they were offered the opportunity,

Did they go though, did they actually leave?

Actually yes, yeah. But they were invited to go to Burghfield. Well, if you can, you know how we do how we do it. So off, they went to Burghfield. And unfortunately, around about this time, one of the very dear people who was involved, Caroline, got involved in a car crash and was killed. And that was really sad. And I always think of it about at the time of the split. So that was the sadness that happened then - right? We still didn't get any publicity, but everybody knew about us. And the locals are starting to hate us.

How did that hatred sort of manifest itself, like what happened?

Shouting at women. Abuse generally, and this is going to get worse. And this is just at the moment, you're being ignored, but you're bloody nuisance, etc. And the council were getting worried, because they wanted the camps out of the way before the cruise missiles arrived. Now I haven't got my itinerary. So I haven't got the dates. Dates are very important at Greenham. So ...

We could, maybe we can, maybe get those from you at some point.

Well you can get them from Berkshire records. I can get you the ...

Yes, we've been there actually.

Right. So by September, women had sent out this letter you know, invite so many friends to come to Greenham. And by December, we did not know this. Although CND bless them had organ - that's the first one that CND organised. We had to have proper toilets. We had to have information tents. And I got so caught up with all this at Orange Gate, I nearly missed the holding hands. And women just came from all over. They came and they came and they came.

Do you mean for Embrace the Base?

Yes. So this was the December.

So presumably you were part of that letter writing?

No.

Oh okay.

Not at all. Can't claim any credit. I was not on the phone tree. I know that Angela, who was on the phone tree said that, you know, her phone never

stopped ringing. No. My support base was just for certain women there. I wasn't that involved.

Right.

Right. So for Embrace the Base, I was doing the information tent and had to run away at the last minute and I was one of the ones who said to the men, 'No, you can't take part.' 'Can you look after the children?' 'Please can you stay away from the fence. Can you stay away from the fence. Can you come away from the fence!' So at the last minute, you know, they blew the whistle and I ran. So I took part in it and had to go back straight away.

And how was the experience of Embrace the Base then?

Not much for me because I was actually busy. So I just did it and came back to the tent. So really the impact of it's lost. But in the evening when they'd all gone home. I went over to main gate and it was lovely because we lit candles and had the song and I wasn't - I didn't have to do anything for anybody. And it was just lovely. I stayed there till quite late. Yes, it was really nice but don't know too much about Embrace the Base. But just the evening when we lit the candles and had the singing was very, very nice. Well the next day women got women who were staying here got up very early. And I wasn't going on Blockade the Base because I was doing something or the other. And it wasn't - I didn't want to do direct action. And that was when everything changed because people were so moved by the Embrace the Base, that we think the government gave out warnings to newspapers, reminding them of their responsibilities. Because by the next day, when women who wanted to take action were blockading, and actually stopping the cars getting in and being roughly handled by the police, and being photographed because there was the press, instead of saying, you know, this is very rough police handling, etc. it was all lesbians and harridans. And it changed completely. It took - I've actually written quite a bit I've got a little bit I had to speak on it, you know, Embrace the Base, Blockade the Base, and were different women the next day. So, but that was still people were still talking about it. Embrace the Base was so iconic. Because they got those helicopters out - because normally, they just say no, six and a half women turned up, one was crying and had to go home. You could see what was happening. It was the first time they could not deny it.

Why do you think that, erm, because we've spoken to some people who were organising Embrace the Base. And they were just they said they woke up in the morning and couldn't believe how many people were there, they were totally shocked. It hadn't been anticipated at all. Why what do you think, was in the communication that made so many people call to action?

I think people wanted to make a personal commitment. They would go on their own if they had to. They wanted to stand up and be counted, even if it was only for one day.

But why do you think that was? I mean, obviously today we don't necessarily have that same - I mean, 35, I think it was about 35,000, wasn't it that were there. So that's huge just huge number. What what do you think it was that just made people want to be stood up and counted?

I think they wanted to come and just make a statement that they did not want nuclear weapons, they didn't want American weapons. They wanted to be part of an all women ceremony. But it was really, really nice in the evening, as I say, with the candles and the singing oh, it's just beautiful.

Yeah, I can imagine.

But as somebody who was harassed, and did five minutes and gone back to the tent, you know, the ins I had no idea it was that big. Because everyone rushed here to come and look at the television. And then we went back and did you know, had something to eat, went back and did the candles and everything else. So so we are still in this bit of Embrace the Base, blockade the base, and it's coming to New Year. And I didn't know about this. I'm told I was invited out. So I missed I threw a New Year party. And hardly anybody came which is most unusual. Where is everybody? Of course, they did the scaling of the fence, didn't they? So that was - and they were so clever. Because what they did is they got an independent producer to come and film them. Plus Beeban and Amanda who were doing Carry Greenham Home came and took film. So just had the two - and they just went for it. And it was lovely. And again, it was this iconic encirclement of non-violent action and women having fun. What the authorities didn't expect - because we had, then had these endless meetings - was that women would all agree to go to jail. They would all agree that each of them would make an individual statement in court and if necessary, go to jail. And that's because a lot of women went over the sewage pipe action but didn't get publicity. But there were what, 42, 44 women? I can't remember which, it's in the files. And they all decided to go. Everyone has the option of having their fine paid. So suddenly, there was a lot of women filling up the courts, filling up the jails. And every time you deferred a case, of course it went on and on. So there was a constant stream coming through. And that was when we realised the power you had just by saying no. But it is scary.

Did you go to court yourself?

I went to court to support. And then I had to come back - the phone box - No, no, no. I had to phone. Phone boxes aren't always working. We did all the phoning here.

Oh, right, okay.

You see, we had one or two other women, but I'm very near the court. So we'd be back and forwards.

So you were kind of running a kind of office here?

Absolutely, this became a Greenham office. Apart from people being ill, and leaving their children here, you see, this is the place where you left it. You don't always know what's going on, you know what's going wrong! So we had three days and I think one of the children got chickenpox, so was coming backwards and forwards. And you can see that in Carry Greenham Home.

Yeah.

The way we were all outside and the Socialist Workers, bless them, they sent a band. And they were told to go home cos socialist workers turn up at everything, you know, because we didn't want to be aligned with - I didn't mind I thought anybody could come. But the the band on the Beeban and Amanda one is lovely. So.

Are you in Carry Greenham Home?

Erm no, but my daughter was running around carrying the soundtrack. No, I wasn't at all. She didn't do the local people. But what she'd do is she used the house and she - we'd see all the early rushes. Because there's loads more of it, that she's given to the Imperial War Museum. I think it's the Imperial War Museum. But, she said I could have some but I think it's much better at the Imperial War Museum. Because I said could I have the bits over but I don't think she thought I'd do an archive seriously.

So, in terms of like, just running this as a Greenham office, like was it always just really busy here then?

No.

It was - no.

Some people would sit around have endless conversations, you know about feminism, about falling out with their girlfriend, about going lesbian. All sorts of things were debated here - people trying to write newsletters all over the place. So erm - and people went to Evelyn's as well. We had Judy Hammond's home, which was used for storing wood and occasionally women went there. And Olive another Quaker had women and Tess. So various outlets, but mine was the closest and the most tolerant, so never needed a babysitter. So, right now I've taken you now into the beginning of '82. Cruise is coming. Greenham is suddenly a wild place to be in. We have a very hot summer of '83 and we are getting lots and lots of women. And also other issues are being discussed. I mean, I learned more about incest, domestic violence, at Blue Gate, where we had very, very young women who came and talked. The gates were gradually opening. Some would open for a day or two days, some would stay. So the most important new gate was Green Gate, cos it was near the

silos. And that opened very early - Fran De'ath, a wonderful Quaker, did it on her own. She was just so brave. She was lovely. But she did it and she actually talked to people as they went to work, which I thought was a really, really big thing to do on her own. I didn't want to do it. So,

And Green Gate was the only women only gate wasn't it?

It stopped. It wasn't when Fran was there. It was later.

Okay.

Later, okay.

Do you know when that happened?

Probably be in my archives if you look. But who knows with Green Gate, they might be women only one week and not the next!

(Laughs).

And Bob went with the message and they said, 'Women only.' And I said, 'Look, do you want to be women only, or do you want your messages?'

Is Bob your husband?

Yes. So what do you want? You know, because I'm not messing around, I can't drive I have to send people to you. If you're saying women only then nobody can drive down the track. Fine. You know, you don't get your letters, you don't get your messages, try walking back to my house, you know. So, but Green Gate was very important because we could watch the progress of the silos.

Right.

And also, they took the names of all the construction companies and reported them to the unions because the unions were being asked to blacklist them. So that was something women did while they were sitting there. But gradually, in '83, you had a groundswell of women - some just came to Greenham to have a good time which is fair enough. And all sorts of issues as they say were being discussed. Yellow Gate was always the ones for doing the more serious stuff. Now Yellow Gate was starting, main gate, was starting, branches were starting. The women's peace camp started in America, one started in Australia. One started in Italy, because they were getting cruise, women from Greenham went to Italy. I don't know much about it. I just know Skeeter, who I love dearly. And she had her arm broken there, they were very rough. So women's peace camps were starting and that was the Greenham initiative. Then we discussed all sorts of things. There was the domestic violence and abuse, erm.

What did you discuss about that? I mean, presumably lots of people escape - came to Greenham escaping that?

Yes. Well discussing it and discussing what should be done about it. Then we had - the Irish women came. And they were asked, you know, take - any women could take part, but we are into non-violent action. We understand it's very difficult for you to in Ireland to do non-violent action, but this is how we do it. And the Irish women were telling us what it was like being incarcerated, especially the Roman Catholic women. You could be searched on the hour. Whether you've got a period, whether you had a young baby - it's very invasive. And that's a form of torture. So strip searching was something I got involved with, because I was strip searched at Greenham. I don't care. I've had four children, I don't care! (Laughs).

Could you - would it be, okay to describe your experience of strip searching? We haven't had anyone...

Oh, lots of women were strip searched.

Yeah, we haven't had anyone talk about it I don't think.

You're strip searched when you go to prison!

Yes. No, I know what it is. I just wondered if you could...

No, I was strip searched on the base. And we queried whether they should do it. Because they didn't even want me to take off my boots. You want to look at my private parts? Go ahead. But a lot of people feel humiliated. I just take the attitude, I'm not ashamed of my body.

What was their justification for strip searching?

In case we had anything hidden on us. Right! But while they're doing all this, I'm wandering into the control room and chatting to the Americans and trying to see what's on their screen. How good is that for security? You're searching women there, they're wandering into the control room, "Hello! How are you?" So in the end, they got so fed up, they rounded us up and threw us out the main gate. We got a cup of tea. But that's what we did on Good Friday. That was much later on. So anyway, we're getting ready for '83, cruise, which is coming in November - and then Sarah Tisdall tipped us off as well. It's very much imminent. So we set up a telephone tree. I'm going to be on the flight path, I don't know one aeroplane from another. So I have to be shown aeroplanes. 'That's the Galaxy! Recognise the Galaxy!' 'I don't know what this one is.' 'Anyway, just describe it if it comes, you know. It'll go quite low. It'll go over your head. You will hear it.' So the children all were told to look out for Galaxy, phone Evelyn Parker if it comes. So we've got a telephone tree.

A Galaxy's what?

Brought in cruise.

Right. Okay.

So - and there were others. I don't know the names of all of them, but some Greenham women know their planes. So I just go as - any low lying large plane that flew over my head I was to report. So - and they came as I was halfway through painting a window-sill in the garden. Had to put it - I never did finish and go and phone - so you know how a telephone tree works?

Yes, but it would be good to...

Yes. What you do - and this was totally improved on our very basic one was - because I'm on the flight path, I phoned members of Newbury group, and they phoned - each of us phoned six people and went on. So my message was the Greenham tree to tell people to come to Greenham, cruise is here. And by that evening, the place was full, absolutely full. They'd carried out some sort of eviction to get women - I wasn't really clear what was happening because I came after it, but they were trying to clear women off one lot of land. And Jane Dennett, I can remember, set up camp opposite the road, the other side of the road. Everything was in chaos. When I got down to the camp that day, we had ordinary police walking round the fence. We had helicopters with lights on swooping over us. So wherever we gathered, they went very, very low so that mud got in our drinks and we were spattered. So - because we had gathered for a meeting in a big round circle, just one side of main gate in the clearing to discuss what we would do next and the helicopter was constantly shining lights trying to disperse us. And the base, I've never known it so terrifying, just got used to it after that. So we had MOD and I think the army were there by then. There was a cordon of people walking round the inside of the base, the police walking round the outside. We were conscious of the Americans inside. It was like a three rings round. And they were so pleased they got cruise in. But we had to decide what we were going to do. So immediately, every outlet from the base had to be covered. Because we were guessing, it could only come out of main gate, or Blue Gate, which is the other side. Do you know where Blue Gate is? It's up from Stroud Green, opposite.

Yeah. Well I've seen maps of the camp.

Yes, it's actually still blue! So and it's where you park now if you want to walk. So we thought it could be either of those, but it could come out of Orange, which is the other one. So we had to keep somebody at times of activity if we were thin on the ground at each possible outlet. But mainly at these three, cos they're not going to come out of Green. I don't understand why but they never came out of Green. And that's what happened. Initially, the convoy came out of Blue Gate, because they weren't finished. Now, that's a

completely different run, if it comes out of Blue Gate is going past my house, which means I have to sit at the side of the road and then run home to phone cos we had no mobiles. So erm, but we did have a system by which, because we didn't know where it was coming, initially, Cruise Watch covered - so wherever it went on any of the major roads within minutes, people would be watching. I mean, you know, Chieveley services came later, but all the service stations would be manned, etc, to see where it was going. But we realised there were only two routes it could take to Salisbury Plain, one through Hungerford, and one up this way. So, right, so Cruise Watch then expanded. And what we did is each local group in Cruise Watch took over an area. So each roundabout had say Stroud on it, or Newbury we did the Swan roundabout and various other groups - Evelyn knows them, I didn't negotiate, they would do patches all the way down. So if somebody was hurt, you knew immediately which group it was. So if you're in a hurry, you just called somebody from that group and say, we need assistance with that, you know someone's there, they've been taken to the police station, can you get down there? You know, so you did everything very quickly, because you're working in the middle of the night. But we did find that cruise is starting to come out, we came out with one or two vehicles and we followed them. But we began to realise that if there was enough of us, they had to have an enormous police presence. So for cruise to come out, they needed 35 police vans and that's where you got them. How are you going to mobilise 35 police vans without anybody knowing? So what did they do? They parked just outside my house! So every day the teenagers before they went to bed get on their bikes, go down the road, there were no police, they'd go to bed or do what they liked. If they're starting to arrive from 10 o'clock, I check, I check. And then I start saying could be tonight. And they're all up the top of Newtown Road. And I walk by, 'Hi! I'm off to Greenham...' you know, '... and I've motivated the telephone tree.'

Wow.

So it was as simple as that. And another occasion, it was a case of a cruise watcher going every day, looking over the wall at a police station to see if the police cars were coming in. So, follow the police cars, you've got the convoy. So that's what - now once the convoy started coming out, it's coming out once a month, no regularity, can be any day of the week, except it's coming out between half past 12 at night and say three in the morning. So when the convoy comes out, women are aware that certain things are happening at the base. Greenham women then decide are they going to go in, or are they going to have a demonstration outside the gate, as it comes out? There was always something going on. And I had to make the decision...

Sorry, what were the convoys for though? What was usually happening with the convoys?

When the convoy goes out, it's as if they're going out to launch cruise missiles.

Oh, right. Okay.

You've got the whole, it's the most terrifying thing you can see all these launchers, plus all the support vehicles plus their Red Cross bit, plus all the police it's a huge line from Beacon Hill, you can see it leaving Greenham.

And they're doing that once a month?

Ah, they had to stop they couldn't get them all out. So they brought out smaller convoys.

And were they going out with that incentive to do that?

Oh well that's the idea. As far as we know, they don't even know if they're going to fire or not.

Gosh.

So, so where were you then? My neighbours could not have cared less. But every time - and when you had a state of alert anywhere, you don't know if they're going to fire. So we treated every exercise as if it was the real thing. So off they go to Salisbury Plain. And then they're met by the Cruise Watch team at Salisbury Plain, where fortunately, they nearly always went to the same place Blackball Firs, which is an important archaeological site which they have wrecked. So while they're at Blackball Firs, there are cruise watchers who've opened up their homes and day and night, they watch it because they don't know if they're going to be there for a day, two days, three days. And they watch the convoy - okay? Greenham women who can't come when the convoy is coming out and in are then, then made a commitment to come out on the weekend. So if the convoy is on Salisbury Plain, women from Manchester, women from Leeds would come and demonstrate on Salisbury Plain, or they would demonstrate in Leeds and Manchester - they would make an effort to let people know. But while it's on Salisbury Plain, we nearly always had one or two demonstrations, even if there were just two or three women. And then it packs up and it comes back in the middle of the night, where it is met by cruise watchers all along the route and you've gotta count them in. Because if the supports haven't all come in, we wait for them as well. Then for a couple of years my role was to get back in, get a bit of sleep, get my copy ready, then from about three, four in the morning, we would start - and gradually we got it down to five or six. And you could only phone me on the hour, the half hour, in between that my phone would be going. Annie did, Annie was brilliant, my friend Annie Ingold. And we would erm, I would phone somebody who would phone six people, etc, etc. And people would phone me so we'd update the news. You know, people from Salisbury Plain would phone to say what had happened there. People on the route would phone to say, 'No, no, we got stopped.' 'So many people arrested... so many people are being held there.' So we had all this news, and we have to get it out for the morning

papers very very early, then do the evening papers, then do the local papers, then and the news stations then do the magazines. But gradually as we got more organised, you know, our job was really to get the actual news account and keep it current. But it wasn't - no one was using it, it wasn't news. Nobody was using it. The other thing women were doing en route,

So you were kind of presumably writing like press releases and...?

Oh yes, we wrote press releases all the time. Yes.

But then at the same time Greenham got so much coverage, didn't it?

What for?

Yeah, just not coverage for...

What for? Dirty women, neglecting their children!

They're neglecting your information and picking up...

Absolutely refusing to engage with cruise. We couldn't get them to engage with cruise. So this became a big issue. Now my speciality was throwing eggs. I got eggs from the wildlife hospital that are beyond description. And they were all in a neat little egg box. I didn't throw them at people. I did once and I crossed the road and apologised to that policeman, but otherwise it went on the convoy. Believe you me, I am told by the Americans who pleaded with me to stop, to be at the side of a cruise convoy vehicle in the hot weather with the remains of one of my duck eggs that had gone off...

Oh god!

It was pretty horrible. I know the children broke one in the bathroom and we could not get rid of the smell. And they were getting a dozen a time. So I had all the eggs anyone had that was off, but it wasn't enough. So we then started a paint industry, we'd get eggs - and I don't believe in wasting food - so we emptied them very carefully, fill them with really hard paint if we could and seal them, and we put them away for the convoy. So that's directional throwing. So there was my bad eggs, which nobody but me wanted to throw. There were my paint eggs, which I'd give out to women. But what they did, other women, so they would save all the leftover porridge with something called gloop and mix flour and various colours in and they would throw that. And in addition, they threw paint. I didn't like throwing paint. I didn't throw paint except in eggs because it can go anywhere like on us. So that was interesting, because this vehicle would come home dripping with stuff and they'd say, 'No, there's been no protest, no demos.' So we decided, you know, we've got to stop the bastard thing. So cruise watches - we got Bob Naylor out, a local photographer because it's hard to get anybody to do things at night. And it's very dark taking photos. So Bob - they stopped the convoy -

and Bob Naylor took those pictures of Sarah Graham standing on it, Ian Lee painting, because it - have to make an agreement. Cruise watch meetings were awful. Nobody must endanger life. So you have to be sure that it's stopped. Before you write on the windscreen, you must not endanger the lives of the people.

Yes.

So that is priority, you must not endanger your own life. So on one occasion there was paint went onto a moving vehicle and there was a complaint made, and we really did get very cross about it because it'd been shot from a sort of cannon. I don't know the details of it. I only know that the person involved was asked never to do it again. Because if you just throw paint on a moving vehicle windscreen...

Yes, yeah.

You know, you could...

You endanger life, yeah.

And these, these could be carrying nuclear weapons. So we were very, very careful. And you were supposed to say what you were doing before you did it. So everybody agreed. So that was how we continued to face the convoys through '83, '84, '85, '86, '87, '88! So that's what we did. And it took up an awful lot of time.

What were your sort of like, interactions with policemen and your relation to policemen?

Oh, that was my field. I decided I would start collecting police complaints. And I went to the meetings with the public. And I kept putting the complaints, they kept on ignoring me, they talk over you. And they let you finish very politely and ignore you. So I kept writing in. Erm, what happens usually is you make a complaint and when it's finally they have to do something about it they'll come and they'll talk to you at length and they'll take a lot of evidence and then they say they're dealing with it. And then a year later, you'll get the same letter as everyone else saying there's not enough evidence. Now if you look in my archives at Berkshire Records Office, you'll see there's a Manchester a woman - it's brilliant. Erm she was there when a police horse went into a woman and injured her.

I've read this, yeah.

And she kept on and on. She followed it through, there's a reply from the Bishop of Oxford saying there were rats at the camp, you know, he - local residents were entitled to complain which was not the issue. This woman's been injured. And at the end of it all, she was told there's not sufficient

evidence. She said, 'You haven't interviewed the witnesses!' But that was it. We can't force them to take action. You've also got in Berkshire Records Office, the accounts of women, the woman at Blue Gate that was hurt with the vehicle. It's very difficult because you can't get the numbers. There's a classic case of Annie and me - well, I wasn't there, but I just left her alone. She went on she decided to get in, which is very dangerous, with the convoy vehicles and slow them down. So - but you have to read it. But basically what happened is the convoy vehicle went into her car, pushed her off the road, the local policeman who was fine came, took the details and she said, 'Can I have his details because I want to claim.' And the man in the convoy didn't want to speak to him didn't want to give details, didn't have a sign on his, you know, didn't have a number plate. So he was lovely that local policeman, we got all his details. The next day as we got up it was announced on the press etc. what Annie had done that she endangered the vehicle she had caused an accident. So we decided enough is enough, so we said, 'Who issued this?' And they said, 'Peter Viner.' We said, 'Was he there?' 'Oh, he's a senior officer. This is an official statement.' So we said, 'Well, who's issued it, him or the Americans?' They were very quiet. They said, 'Well, your local man has made a statement. We've got a copy of it, which is right.' In the meantime Annie was told she couldn't get compensation. She didn't know the number of the vehicle. So it was so interesting. So they produced Peter Viner plus this very senior chap. And Peter Viner said, 'I didn't write that. The Americans wrote the statement. I gave it out. I didn't know there'd been another step. Didn't know what happened.' And we said, 'Thank you. Can we make it clear, we do not want to prosecute this man, he has, he's a really good policeman, we all like him. But this is what you're doing, you're actually issuing statements from the Americans, which is contrary to what your own police force is saying.' So that was a nice little victory. So they sent him off to the Bahamas for a bit. And he came back and was promoted, but he's nice. But it's very difficult for them, you know, the Americans were just issuing statements, etc. and the police were going along with it. Also, at this time, various Greenham women who tried to make complaints about police - I mean, if we only had mobile phones, it would just be wonderful. I have never been spoken to, sworn at, or - I've never witnessed behaviour, like the police at Greenham. I think every single member of our Cruise Watch team received an assault. I had such a bad kicking in the back of my neck. I have a dislocation between my head and my spine. And he didn't have a number, I couldn't do anything about it, as he said. But I was very good. I didn't hit him back, which I really did want to do with my placard.

I bet that was really painful, wasn't it?

Well, it put me in a collar for two weeks.

Gosh, wow.

But every member and the ones they really took it out on was the Buddhists because I think they thought they were skinheads, even the older women were thrown about.

Gosh!

Yes. I challenged one of our county councillors, Trevor Brown, who was on the police committee, 'Just come out with Cruise Watch, you'd have to come out with us come out as an independent person and see for yourself.' He came out, he saw what had happened. He received an assault. He was followed home. He was terrified. He phoned me up and I said, 'Well, would you like to make a complaint to the police?' And he said, 'No, no, I'm not getting involved in this.' So there you go. What you don't see you can't complain about, but, but I think women felt, I certainly felt, that I didn't count. I was not entitled to police protection. They were only there to safeguard the American cruise convoy - I've no respect for any of them. And as for the amount of lies they told in court, because you think this is before the episode with the newsagent - do you remember there was a big protest in London and a policeman killed a newsagent?

No, I don't. No.

And then, oh no, no it's a classic case. People were protesting and a member of the public was passing by. And for some reason, the policeman grappled with this man.

When was this, sorry?

Ooh about 10 years ago.

Right.

And somebody filmed it and put it on the internet.

Right.

And that was the first time it was challenged in court that a policeman, in the course of his duties, had for no reason killed this man. But we said this is how the police behave at all our demos.

I can't believe that was the first time!

Oh no, but you couldn't, what I'm saying is during the Greenham years, it was impossible to make a case against a policeman that would stick.

Wow.

And we weren't filming then. And we weren't - we didn't have mobile phones. We couldn't record. People just didn't believe what we had to say. So that was really tough, the fact the police behaved so badly.

You must have been so angry watching that occur, that it happened to women as well around you.

Oh, you got used to it. And of course, the soldiers were quite rough, except late at night, they're wandering around the fence, they talked to women, they get friendly with women. So the soldiers were moved every two to three weeks. But the soldiers were not unsympathetic. Lorna said the Americans used to be quite sympathetic sometimes, and sometimes awful, threw water on you, that sort of thing. But she'd know much more about what it's like living at Blue Gate.

Did the women feel safe at night, do you think?

No, no. Which is why we said men are welcome to visit during the day, but not at night. So this pro - this was a problem for Cruise Watch men. Because the other thing Cruise Watch men did is they came down and from about 10 o'clock, they would be round the base so if any women needed any - and not many women are driving alone at night, so the cruise watch men would take a woman if they could. But you knew the Cruise Watch man was there. We had ship to shore Charlie's so you could contact them quite often. If you had a problem...

Sorry, what's a ship to shore Charlie?

I'm going to come to that in a minute. Erm we had points of contact. They wouldn't, you'd know if he was a Cruise Watch man, he'd come near the gate and not the gate they come near the gate like Orange Gate, etc. So if you had a problem at night he's transport, do you follow? Because otherwise you're stuck somewhere at Orange Gate you haven't got a car you can't get away you can't get help. So that's something else Cruise Watch did they had a little, they encircled the base at night.

And was your husband involved in that?

Certainly not, no! He was a Daily Mail journalist.

Oh gosh!

Sub editor, didn't get involved at all. But that was something else.

Who did you work for?

Me? I worked once I was married, etc. I worked for the HTA News for eight years during Greenham, writing things about the horticultural trade, very

respectable. My boss knew what I was doing, just laughed. So that was very nice that the Cruise Watch men were there so you could take messages to them. That was reassuring, because at night, the women were finding erm vigilante - this is something else, the town was getting violent. There were two groups of vigilantes in the town. One came from the taxi drivers. They used to meet at the Railway Hotel which is now gone. And they used to plan and they used to go into women's tents and defecate, they'd steal things. They just dropped a tent down on you all sorts of little - not to kill you just to frighten you. Here in black, very frightening. Threw stones, airguns fired.

Were they a large group?

I don't really know. But then we had the other ones, we had the sort of para lot that used to meet. And they were far more threatening, there were two lots. Their actions were similar, but they were different. Then Rebecca had blood and maggots thrown at her tent at the main gate.

Rebecca Johnson?

Yes, and there was just a feeling of unease at night, you didn't do anything on your own. If you went to the toilet, you went with somebody etcetera. But as I say, Cruise Watch did give you this backup. And weekends there were always women there with cars. So you didn't get so much. But then we had -

Living with that fear, though.

That was the thing and the darkness. And the fact that police aren't going to protect you. The military aren't going to protect you. In fact, if you're friendly with the soldiers, you were fine depending what soldiers were around because they were very much aware of what was going on. And we were their's - you know what I mean? It was Brits against Americans, they used to fight with the Americans. So then we had another little phase of women being beaten up. And that was not nice. There was just sort of six months to a year period - two very young girls sleeping at Green Gate had the tent come in on them and they were kicked and kicked. So that wasn't nice. Then we have the classic case of Jane Powell and Hazel were attacked. And of course Hazel doesn't see very well. Now that was a case I took up with the police complaints. Because I said to them, 'You don't have a description of one of the men. You've issued two different kits of the same man and you don't even realise you've got, Jane's description and Hazel's description is the same man they didn't see the second man!' Now that was interesting because I pursued it and pursued it.

What happened to those two women?

Oh Jane - they were, they were slightly hurt, but then had to go to hospital. They were very badly frightened. So I kept on about it. And Hazel said to me, 'I

know who he is. You know, he came to the fire later and I know.' Because being half blind, she knows people.

Yes, of course, yeah.

And I could never get to the bottom of it. And then when I went to Hazel's funeral I was talking to her husband I said, 'One of the things I regret is I never got a prosecution.' 'Ha!' And he laughed at me and he said, 'You know I'm ex RAF?' Because they're ex RAF family. He said, 'I took it upon myself to report this.' And the man the RAF commander etc. sent him a message to say it had been dealt with.

Right? Is it this Hazel Rennie?

Yes.

There's her book of poems...

Terrible poems, but she's lovely - was lovely. I never realised till her death how blind she was. She's blind in one eye, it was after an operation. And she was living in that half light. And she got around, she got in the base. She you know, she was very active. And she never asked, you know, help me or I can't see this. Maybe it helped. But Hazel was very full on.

Did you ever hear about sexual assaults at the camp as well?

Hmm, I can't talk about that one. Can't talk about that one that's very private.

Yeah.

The two cases I know, but then they are and they aren't connected with Greenham. But there's one that's very public and she might want to talk to you, but I don't know. And I wouldn't, I wouldn't recommend going there with either of them.

Okay.

I'm really sorry on that.

No, no, don't be silly, that's fine.

Yeah.

I was more looking for a general comment really, anyway.

But there were always, there were always cases of women having their breasts fumbled. And sweaters deliberately pulled down. But they'd have to take that up with you.

Yeah.

Sorry about that one.

No, no, no, that's fine. And so could we talk about the different gates and the relationships?

(Laughs). Right, we can start off - I will start with Green Gate because it's easy. And I had lots of friends there. Green Gate started with Fran. And that was a really difficult gate to be. And then women really liked it. And then we had the Buddhists and people complained if you stayed at Green Gate, you were woken up with the drumming at six o'clock. But, and also it's very swampy at Green Gate, but used to be the safe area for women and for the children. Green Gate was also known for the area, they had sort of music and art and very arty farty, and muesli. And then we had the business of the zapping, have we got the zapping yet? The zapping was very prolific at Green Gate. So they decided to evacuate. Just leave it totally. So that's what happened. My daughter loved it. She loved playing with the bones there. Lots of bones, apparently lots of bones of domestic animals lying around. 'I like playing with the bones.' 'What!?'

(Laughs).

Erm so then you move along. And then you've got - your moving from Green, you have Emerald Gate, which is very ramshackle. It's just a little sort of tent. And you could look directly into the silos area, so you knew what was happening. And you could also fade from Emerald onto the path that leads down to Blue and they couldn't see you. They never knew what you were doing at Emerald, because you come and you could see into the silos area. And if you wanted to disappear, you could disappear. So then you walk down the side path, there's the fence, and there's a wooded area and you come out at Blue Gate. And somewhere along there is an opening called Turquoise, which sometimes - it was quite important once because Lorna saw the gate open and swapped the padlocks. So she had the padlock key. So if you wanted to go in, you could go in from there you see. So for a long time you had your own personal key to get into Greenham. (Laughs). Then the next one is Blue Gate. That tended to be the young girls, the very noisy girls and the neighbours hated them. Now the complication at Blue Gate, I find, is they only know the neighbours by the name of their dogs. You know, they called them the Radfords. But that's actually their dog. You know, and they had all these names. Um Blue Gate, the neighbours were terrible. Erm, you know, they had spectacular names like Mrs. Skull, who used to open the window and welcome the cruise missiles going past.

Oh my goodness.

She moved. Erm yeah. Now the other side was a councillor.

Why was she called Mrs. Skull?

Because that was the man she married. Most unfortunate name.

(Laughs). Oh, I thought you'd nicknamed her!

No, no, no, no. So the other -

I thought she was a symbol of death or something!

She was! She was appropriately named. The other side was a councillor, a Greenham councillor who made a lot of trouble for them. And then there was one of these episodes at Greenham which is inexplicable. We had somebody called Verity, who was suffering from a mental health problem. And Verity did everything naked, which meant when she had periods, things were difficult. And Verity went to Blue Gate. And the local councillor found Verity dancing in his back garden and made a complaint to the police. That split the Newbury weekly news. Everyone had a view on it, you know, and you had to point out, you know, she's not doing any harm. She's dancing on the grass. But yes, Verity was a major problem nobody could solve because do you make, force her to make clothes and conform or is she free to not take her tablets and dance in the nude? But she was a very sweet, gentle girl. So that was another problem.

How old were you at Greenham, sorry, when you first went?

Er, de de de de de, '81, I would have been I was about, born in 1940, was I 31 or 41?

31 I think?

I'm trying to think. I was born in 1940, '50, '60, '70, '80. No, I'd have been 40, in my 40s.

Oh right, ok.

My youngest child was five.

Right.

So, right. What are we up to? I was saying about Blue Gate.

The relationship between the gates and,

Yes. Then along that main road, you had Violet Gate and Indigo Gate, which were interchangeable because the Americans changed the road. So they moved, you see when the the the main gate moved, they moved. They were

very small groups of women. And they were there mainly to look at the hangars, to see what was coming out. Then up the road, there's Red Gate, which is mainly for weekends. And whichever - there is Violet Gate, Indigo Gate. And Violet Gate became something else and then Red Gate - was it Indigo where the women - Violet and Indigo were very different. But there's one other one and then there's Red Gate, because Violet Gate, they all dressed in dresses and curled their hair and were on very friendly terms with the squaddies, they'd go, 'How's your mother?' (Whispering) 'How's your gran? Want a cup of tea?' I couldn't, I couldn't be doing with it, you know.

Did you naturally have a gate that you felt more connected to you?

Yes, Orange Gate. I'm coming to -

Orange Gate.

Orange Gate, we never took anything seriously. We always had the people who walked on stilts and did fire blowing you know blowing fire out of their mouth. And it was a good place for the children. So when they're all having long, long discussions, you know.

And were you, I suppose Helen, were you with Helen John a lot at that point?

No, Helen John was Yellow Gate and Helen John.

Yeah, was she at Yellow Gate the whole time though?

She was always, she was never comfortable anywhere else. She always wanted to meet the decision makers. And then Helen left. Oh, she'd gone by '86, and she helped to set up at Menwith Hill. And then she did talks and things. And then Helen died two years ago with dementia, which was very sad.

She was one of the reasons we actually applied for funding for the project actually.

Good. Yes. And it's just such a shame that you couldn't have taped her because she spoke so well. She explained things very easily. That was the thing with Helen, she could really put things - because she was going blind so she didn't do that much reading. So she assimilated things and just got them, 'Ah the bastards have done this that and the other, cause this is what they want.' You know. She went on television during the Falklands War and pointed out that Rolls Royce was still supplying the Argentinian government. What was that about? You know, she just, she just had information nobody else did. And she was so funny and we never ever fell out, she's good at falling out with people but we never fell out. But there you go.

And so did you ever go to Yellow Gate ever?

Yes, yes. Especially when Helen was there and Sjöö. Initially my friends were at Yellow.

Yeah, that's what I thought, yeah.

But they never stopped at Yellow Gate. There was always somebody having a go at somebody else or a long argument and three hours sitting round the fire, I couldn't be doing with it.

It was the largest gate wasn't it?

It was the largest gate and the most contentious gate and the most difficult gate to live in. Because it fronted the road. And there were people constantly coming in and out. And they got most of the abuse. And most of the major evictions were always there. We always went up for the major evictions as local people and tried to save food and tried to negotiate.

So, so, you felt that the decision making gate was Yellow Gate at the camp? Is that what you...

For some things, but each gate was, took no notice of Yellow Gate and carried on. Yellow Gate thought they made the decision every other gate said 'Yes, yes, whatever.' And got on with it, but. And, but you had to all get together for things like Cruise Watch.

Yeah.

And if you were very short, and women were going to court they needed to be picked up and taken to court. And if people were held at police stations, people will go to police stations and wait for them. You never stopped, there was no time to sit about at Greenham because you had to be everywhere else. So, yes, while all this is going on, the police are arresting '84 and '85 they are arresting more and more women. There was one court set up in Newbury Magistrates Court every day virtually which was just for Greenham women. Obstruction, trespass and as Reggie Benn pointed out, they did an obstruction case from Edward VI - couldn't be detained on obstruction but they used that to detain women overnight. Why do they want women sitting round the cells? The police station was full! They used the police stations Windsor, Oxford women were taken to, because at the times the prisons were too full. We filled all the police stations, which meant you need Green, Greenham women would be there watching all the time, you know, going out.

Were you ever arrested?

Oh, all the time. But it -

You never went to prison though?

I went - I'm the only person who's ever been thrown out of prison.

(Laughs). Can you tell us about that?

Yes, I will. My MP was very, very fond of saying, 'No, local women aren't involved.' Though he got all these letters from me. 'It's not a local protest. Local women don't go to prison. Local women aren't involved.' And I kept saying, 'What about me?' (Laughs). But it was very interesting. Because there was the case, the case for um, oh I'll bring that in later. Yes. So we were there. But what we would get normally is a day in the cells, and you'd be released, but they made a mistake with me - all of us on the same Nagasaki action, everybody else gets a day in the cells. Me, Annie and Sarah, who said she'd never appear in court with me again, because I gave seven defences. She was so sick of me. She decided we'd go for a week to Hol - a Hol - week in Holloway. Which everyone was very indignant about you know. And she wouldn't hear my defences. She only heard two or three I think it was, so, off I went to Holloway. But of course McNair Wilson's always saying no local woman has ever gone to jail. So I arrive at Holloway. And once again, I'm asked, do I want to pay a 10 pound fine. And the police women with me were lovely. 'Had I brought any grapes? Had I got this? Had I got that?' (Whispering) 'Just pay the fine, we'll take you home.' You know. 'No! I'm going in.' So I went in. And I went in with Sarah, whose father's an admiral, she's really really good if you're arrested, you know. She'll go to the Americans, 'A shower!' You know, she's really good at that. And she's really good at telling policemen stand up straight etc. She cos she knows how to cos - and don't forget, a lot of men are used to their nannies. I always treat men in service as if I'm their nanny, but Sarah doesn't, Sarah does the admiral.

What do you mean by that?

'You're a disgrace!' You know, I am - one occasion I affected a citizen's arrest. 'I will be handing you over to a policeman.' And we had a citizen's arrest and the police stopped the car and said, 'You've got one of my men.' I said, 'Citizen's arrest.' 'Sarg, Sarg it's a citizen's arrest.' 'Get in the car!' It is amazing. It is amazing. They're so used to doing what they're told. Anyway, I'm in prison.

Yeah.

This is the next day, after breakfast where they really do give you porridge. But they didn't put us in the general prison. They said they were full. So we went on the muppet wing. Now if you go on the muppet wing, you lack any credibility in Holloway - I didn't care - because people say you're mad. But I took advantage on the muppet wing because I slipped out to see the women on there and they were all really really dopey. And my daughter, eldest daughter, is mentally handicapped so I know when people are being over sedated. So I slipped off, this lovely shoplifter kept the woman occupied so I

slipped out and talked to some of the women. And if you're very obliging, the poor screws don't know what to do with you. So I was herded back in. And they said, 'You're going out today.' I said, 'No, no, I'm in for a week with my friend Sarah.' 'No, you're going out.' So I was out after breakfast. So I made a complaint. Because they'd taken five pounds and said, 'That's enough. You can go home. Here's your free ticket home you get a free...' I said, 'This doesn't make any sense. The taxpayer's got to pay for me to get home. I'm perfectly capable of getting home and you've taken my money. I shall write!' And they said, 'Do that, go!' And then of course the poor old screws they say things to you like, 'What is your number?' I said, 'I haven't any idea.' 'You can't go without your number. You've got to give me your number.' Because they want to bully you. I said, 'I don't mind. I'm here for the week.' 'You have to go.' So.

What was the atmosphere like in Holloway?

Well, I never went. I went to the muppet wing in Holloway, which is different.

Oh okay, how is it different?

It's where people who are mentally unstable go.

Yeah.

So you lack any credibility if you've been to the muppet wing - except Sarah and I don't care.

But what was it like there? What was the atmosphere like?

We were contained with other women. And the first notice is, 'Do not discuss your case with other women.' We discussed everybody's cases. We're all in here. We're going to give everyone support. But it was awful because the women were banging and shouting right through the night. So I can't tell you about Holloway cos I didn't see it. I only saw the muppet wing. So what happens when I get home? I get a call from the BBC. We were going to do a film on the muppet wing. I said, 'Good-o.' They said, 'It's closed down.' I said, 'It was open last week, I was there.' So did do the program on the muppet wing. Because I said, in my opinion, the woman were sedated. 'How'd you know?' I said, 'I talked to three of them.' 'You did?' 'I did.' And I was explaining, you know, and I said our beds had faeces on them - I don't care. But it's it's not on. I said that they're treated like rubbish. You know, and erm...

Well, the muppet wing's a pretty offensive term, isn't it? In and of itself.

Yeah, yeah. I said we were offered non prescription drugs to get us to sleep. There's me saying, 'You are offering women non prescription... Are you allowed to do this?' But that's what they do. And it says they put things in the

tea to keep you medicated. But on the whole, the screws weren't offensive in any way. They were just, just very casual.

Did you find that upsetting?

No. I've been in boarding school. That's exactly the same. (Laughs).

Right.

Yeah. And I know how to annoy people. But yeah. One curious incident, one of the very young women we were with, cause we were isolated on the muppet wing I think there would have been about six of us, because they were very interested in Sarah and myself. And we were saying, you know, once they knew I was going out, I was taking messages for everybody and writing it in my library book. So I had messages for all these phone calls. But this one really pathetic woman was there. And she said, 'I was a hit and run driver.' We couldn't believe it. You know. She didn't know what she was doing. But she'd left two children. And nobody had told her what would happen. So I promised I would phone and get a message back because another Greenham woman coming, going in when I was going out I went to court, left her the message to pass on in Holloway because we had this stream of information. So and one woman had left her cat in a locked up house. So because I was going, I phoned up the RSPCA and can you get in this house? They were so interested in me. 'How did you do that?' 'I was in Holloway,' I said, 'But can you get cat out?' You know!

Never mind mind that!

Yes, and I've been running your cat rescue. So you do know who I am! So that was interesting. But well-loved then got a letter from me. I said you know, you've taken my money, thrown me out of prison. I should be there for a week. And he did acknowledge I was in prison, because there's never been any record of me going to prison.

Right.

So later on -

So you've never had a criminal record or anything?

I've never got - so then when we were all getting compensation when we won - I'll come to this in a minute - but when we got compensation, they called it costs. Judge Late said he looked at my notes, said, 'And they shall not be a stain on your character!' And everybody laughed because they knew a mischief I got up to, so but the idea was to give us criminal records. And they were blacklisting us for jobs as well. So it's nasty.

I know a lot of women really struggled with that.

Yes, I did. I could have got a job at the museum. I was up for it. No qualifications, but I could write pamphlets. And he was so weak-kneed he gave in. I just thought, what a bastard you are, you could have made a stand for me, I was a friend of yours. So anyway, where are we? I'm in prison. I'm out of prison. And Sarah stays in for the week and says it's my fault. So, erm, yes, so this was happening - what was happening - and this is when my lovely friends Leslie and Wendy, who are - one's now 101 who's wife died two years ago. My very dear friend, they would go to court practically every day and keep a record of women and who was going in, who was going out. They'd also note who was in court. Anybody really strange in court. And we were getting - is it a consistency? What is the magistrate who's brought in? Ooh, you know the term con something magistrate?

I don't know.

It's when you bring somebody in for a brief period and you pay them. And we had one who was really awful, and we said we don't want him in court. We don't want him trying our cases. And then we got a man who was absolutely amazing, he was determined none of us were going down! And this is his classic case, I thought he was lovely. I had thrown orange paint with my - we were getting organised. I represented, I threw orange paint at the convoy vehicle as it was coming in. Other women had thrown different paints. So I knew what I had thrown. Georgina - who had dressed up as a bush - came out and threw paint, got arrested, was in court. So the magistrate said, 'You can't plead guilty. I'm not allowing your plea. Let's hear the case.' And the man said, 'She threw paint.' So the magistrate said, 'What colour?' And he said, 'I don't know!' So he said, 'Well, if you can't say what colour paint...' and we all said, 'I threw paint!' 'I threw...' it was like Monty Python. 'I threw paint! I threw paint!' 'What colour paint did I throw?' You know, so because he couldn't identify the paint Georgina had, he let her off. I thought it was brilliant! And he also made the point, how can you possibly deface a camouflage vehicle? It looks as if someone's been sick on it anyway. You know? So erm, we got off on that one! Every now and then you have a small victory of common sense.

If you erm, when you think about the legacy of Greenham, what, what are your feelings on that? I mean, obviously, you said at the start of the interview, that obviously that Greenham women have been ignored.

Not now. Not now, because they've grown up and taken over.

Yeah.

I mean, it's lovely to see a woman -

Obviously, it's not taught on the syllabus or anything.

Isn't it?

No.

I don't know how you would teach it.

Well, NVDA?

What's that? Oh, non-violent direct action?

Yeah.

Hmm. Yes, it's - NVDA is a different way of thinking. It's a different way of arguing. It's not just Lynn Jones saying, 'Now, if he grabs you like this, what will you do? You will relax!' You know, it's actually about arguing in a different way. Erm yes, it would be interesting. No, I think what Greenham did...

I mean, I think it does crop up occasionally I think, but it's not like a big when you think how enormous a campaign was and how many people were involved it's a tiny little...

No, I think what Greenham did is teach a lot of women to think for themselves and to have confidence.

Yeah.

And if you can think along the NVDA lines, sometimes humour and common sense will get you farther, and don't accept what people say is the law. There are all sorts of ways around - there are lots and lots of little laws you can use. You have to do your homework, if you go to court.

When cruise left, do you feel that that was in part because of what you'd all achieved?

Yes. Shall I come to that cause I don't know how much time you've got? Because this little...

About 15 minutes.

Right. This continued, cruise out, cruise in, cruise being harassed on Salisbury Plain. Women at different camps opened, closed, open, closed. Women represented abroad, they went speaking everywhere. Women being taken seriously politically on some, in some areas and not in others. Then women also took up areas like food surpluses, food being made into plastic instead of feeding people. They took up the areas of nuclear testing. Lorna, who was the niece of a famous Labour MP, Jane and Julie went walking over a nuclear test site in America and stopped a nuclear test. They got amazing publicity, but it was a very dangerous thing to do. Contacts between Greenham and governments that politicians from the the erm, from Russia

and from Soviet Republics would come and visit us and take us seriously - which our politicians didn't. Politicians from Australia, from Canada and outstanding women came and talked to us at Greenham on issues. It was an education it was a university for young women. And also women were being made much more aware of how they could conduct themselves in the court and how they generally could face political arguments. That, you know, that the state wasn't always right, it could - but how to do it and to do it with confidence. They also were learning much more how to live with each other as they lived at camp because conditions were terrible - you couldn't own property virtually. I'd come to the evictions. By about 1984, evictions were really heavy. And by '84, '85, you virtually couldn't own property at camp. We were issuing women with Gore-Tex. So you could sleep out if you put the head on. And we then had these wonderful getaways, which a Quaker woman designed. And if various Quaker groups put their name on them, Newbury council had to return them because you just went and said, 'My tent's been taken.' And they said, 'Well, how can you prove it?' 'It has got so and so written on it, please send it back.' And you'd get it back. But you could have five evictions a day. And they took everything and they damaged everything. So each gate really needed a car. So you could stick everything in the car or have something on wheels, you could wheel it away. They were even putting what we call the evicting policeman, local police would come and watch the evictions. They never did anything for the women. They could see bikes, they could see everything taken. They never interfered except to stop you with, if the bailiffs took something of yours. They would just let the bailiffs take it. We had horrendous cases - Julie Howard was in her sleeping bag when she was dragged along. Rebecca had her hand caught in the muncher and she went for a civil case later and won it.

What's the muncher, sorry?

Oh, right. They used to bring the dustbin - the dustbin van, that you push things in and it crushes everything. So if you are trying to retrieve something that comes down on you, it's horrendous. It really is. So anything that's in the muncher is very hard to get out. You know, the local kids would have their bikes put in. (Laughs). Well, it was dreadful.

So her hand was must have been completely destroyed then?

No, it was just badly hurt. And she has a disability with that hand to this day. But that was an interesting court case because she went on a civil court case on that one. Yes, he wasn't all together sympathetic. She did win. But it was interesting having the bailiffs in court, because they were absolute thugs. And it's widely believed - though I can't prove it, because the only person took a photo lost it - that Michael Ryan was employed part time. But let's face it until he flipped Michael - the mass killer? He had never done anything untoward but the women recognised him when the pic - remember the Hungerford killer?

Oh, the Hunger - yes, I do know.

He is widely **that might be legend** widely thought to have been among the bailiffs for a short time, because In - Indra recognised some kind of photograph of him, but she never produced it. Okay, now we are coming to Wendy and Leslie and the court case. Yellow Gate women erm, started an action - I had tried to bring it as one of my defences to prove that Greenham was still a common and therefore, the base was illegal. They took it all the way up to the House of Lords. In the meantime, we had the split in '87. But until then, I'd got them the Baxendale papers. Leslie and Wendy had done so much work on that. And they'd also got them the services of Barbara Cohen for free, and she's lovely. So when they say we did it without help, that is rubbish. They got a load of legal help. They got a load of help from local people. We got them all their documents, and they never gave us a word of thanks.

Who, who didn't?

Georgina and Jean Hutchinson took the case very bravely all the way up to the House of Lords and won. But a lot of the, you know, the donkey work was done initially by members of Newbury group. Evelyn Parker, Leslie and Wendy - the only thing I did is I fought very hard for the Baxendale pa - the Baxendale papers which proved - it proved who owned Greenham. The Baxendales sold the land and Newbury council would not release it to me. I said, 'It's public information.' Do you want to put your legs up on the settee?

No.

Because I do. But they said no. So I then - Rosemary Saunders Rose who is a very Tory one, with hats - she kindly interfered and said, 'Of course, you can have the papers.' So with the Baxendale papers they could go, because that proved it was common land. So, went up all the way to the House of Lords. We then found you know, it was common land. They're thinking about winding down with cruise. But they were also thinking of expanding it for another American operation. And Wendy and Leslie, because Leslie had a brilliant mind, looked at papers. And he said, 'I didn't think they've had planning permission for any of the buildings on the base since World War Two.' So Leslie, because he was quite old, got me to help. And we went to every council meeting opposing the application for a radio mast they wanted to put up. And we could never find out what happened. Each meeting we went to wasn't discussed, it wasn't discussed. And in the end, on Radio 4, it said, you know, all the buildings were retrospective.

Right.

So they'd come to a complete halt. So they pulled cruise out and they decided to go. Because if they'd stayed, they'd have to go back on all that it was just tripped them up with paperwork, just because people say it's common, it

doesn't mean to say it's true, do your homework. And he did it. It would have just been so nice if those two women had ever thanked them. So Leslie and Wendy then went to the commoners and said you've got commoners' rights. And then they started a chain of action, and they've got the common back - except half of it's an industrial estate. So. So that's another, that's another little bit of homework that's going on.

And just before we finish, did you want to talk about the split? Or not?

Oh, I can tell you what happened.

Yeah. It would be good to get another perspective.

We went, we went - there was an opportunity to go to the - course I am thinking back now - we were going to the World Congress of Women. And Yellow Gate had some tickets. I mean, Bob, at that time, was involved with the news on Sunday that'd come to an end. So he didn't have a job. And I had given in my notice, because I was going to move to Manchester, so I didn't have a job. And so women at Yellow Gate decided they'd share their tickets they had free tickets, and invited me and Annie to go. I didn't particularly want to go. Moscow is a long way away I had the children to see to. And I hadn't done anything very political for Greenham, and I thought it was a really nice thing for them to ask me. So I said yes. And we went, and at the airport, we met up with them. And they joined our party, which is you know fine. So we all flew off to Moscow, got a big reception. And you were given several slots for your various dues. And then we met up with Camden women, and they'd come from London, they'd paid their own tickets, etc. And they had a nice agenda too, and they were Greenham Women. But the general feeling that the Yellow Gate women felt that they were the Greenham Women and we were support women. So I've never been a support of anybody, really. So when we came to doing a workshop - we'd had an earlier workshop with Camden women, where Rose and I had shown films of Greenham, happy, happy films, we all had singing and the Yellow Gate women were very disapproving of this because people are having a good time. But you know, you've only got a small slot, we had several small slots. And you know, we just thought if people could see the fun of Greenham, what life was like at Greenham... So we're looking at films of women at camp, what day to day life was like and we sang the songs, we had a happy time. So then we were doing this serious one. And to my surprise,(...) was there was her books, talking about all she'd done for Greenham, etc, etc. You know, we only had this sort of 15 minute slot, and one of our group was sort of rolling her eyes. So we slipped away to a side room and said, you know, we're gonna have to ask her to stop. So all it was you know - I knew she came to Greenham, she's entitled to talk as a Greenham woman. She'd actually come representing another organisation, Wages for Housework. You know, she'd had her own slots, which we weren't talking at. So I went in and sort of said, you know, 'We've had enough now, can somebody else speak?' So the workshop disintegrated. But she'd also given erroneous information. She said it was a woman's only march from

Wales and I was rude enough to interrupt and say, 'No, there were men there and children.' And that was rude. But it's just she didn't know our history. So the workshop totally disintegrated. She went off in a huff. And they just kept themselves separate all the way through. They kept protesting and interrupting. We had a good time. We met all these women. We talked to them. We made contacts. So when we got back to camp, I was summoned to a meeting. I said no, not going. So there was a meeting, which I didn't go to. So I mean, anybody who wanted to hear what happened to me went to Orange Gate, and we sat round and discussed it. But after these public meetings where certain Greenham women were trashed, you were accused of either taking money or being a racist. And I said, bit about being a racist. You do know I'm mixed race. I was brought up in India, and most of my family are not quite brown, and not quite black, but somewhere in between. So they said I'd made that up, which is fine. I'm just very white skinned. So, um, yes, and I you know, I'm used to boarding school, I don't allow myself to be bullied. But some of the women they went to two big meetings and the way Wages behaved, denouncing you, you get denounced for stea - oh I was then denounced for stealing money. And I said, 'That was a whip round Janie had, we've actually got it...' Annie had kept the account. Everybody had put five pounds, one pound, it was about twenty quid, which we had actually us given in at money meeting to be recorded. We said, 'No, that was a whip round!' and as I was unemployed, and Annie was unemployed, we was as entitled to go, and you'd offered it to us, you know. So we were I was accused of being a racist. I had attacked (...) - I'd simply asked her, you know, she'd had her say, can we get on with the workshop? Which I'd have done to anybody. Then I'm accused of taking money, which was whip round. So it caused a split of the camp because the Yellow Gate women wouldn't work with anyone, because they were leaders. So gradually, women just drifted to the other camps. But oh they made awful statements.

How many people were left at Yellow Gate then?

Well, don't forget people keep coming and being turned - about six or seven of them stayed and they've written horrible books about the rest of us. The other gates virtually, I mean, it was coming to the end then. The oh the split. The split happened in '87, June. And at CND conference in the autumn, it was discussed at CND conference and it was passed, you know, said what had happened, and Bea Campbell, the journalist, you know, was asked to write about it because none of us felt it was fair for us to write it. And also Yellow the um, the Wages for Housework were getting very threatening. They had approached women, a woman in Bristol in the basketball club, and had bullied her into leaving. And we got Bindmans to represent her there. And it was just getting out of hand. And we were discovering other groups that they had disrupted. And just thought people should be cautious of them, which I would say to this day. So as I say, CND announced that Yellow Gate was not going to be part of the the peace camp. So we continued because cruise was still coming in and out and they said they didn't want to know. So we didn't give them the information then they complained they weren't given the

information. I thought, do you know, what? Not arguing. So, we continued with cruise but it got more difficult because you know, we're not getting any information from Yellow Gate. And what happened then? What was happening? We were still getting represented all over the world. Women were traveling, women were talking.

When did you - cos I'm aware we've got to close up now - but when did you finish your work at Greenham or did, did it, I mean, did it carry on?

Well, once cruise went - well, once the convoy stopped going, we could rest a bit. Then I got slightly involved with the commons again. To see the common restored.

And what do you - are you active now?

Well, not really. Aldermaston peace camp's going. I go occasionally to see my friends. But um.

So did you miss it when it finished?

I did miss it a lot. We've all kept up our friendships. But it was just overwhelming for 10 years. And then my children had grown up and I was doing different things. And I was going to work, not working from home, I was going to work. So my horizons changed.

Yeah.

But it's not, you know, a time of my life I would have ever missed. But apart from the episode with Yellow Gate, which is, I mean, now I'd have handled it differently. I'd have been much more aware that people can disrupt things with exterior motives. And sometimes for what doesn't seem to be an obvious reason. And people that have been really quite close friends to you don't even want to listen to your explanation of what's happened. They're just, 'Right!'

Yeah. And just ending on a kind of... what, what's your sort of happiest memories of it?

I think, really the sing songs and the mucking about at Orange Gate. You know, we did so many things that were just so funny. I mean, there was one time when we were waiting for the convoy to come out. And we were in a graveyard and somebody fell in a grave. The convoys go out there to do and, you know, the, there's only one policeman who actually realised we were there and he was trying to block us and we'd be going, 'Scuse me!' and going on either side of him, getting this woman out of the grave covered in mud. It was the Watership Down one, the Watership Down church, the Unborn Road one. Gosh, I hadn't got out. But it used to be fun, because we used to dodge up wherever the police were. And you couldn't be everywhere. You just all disappear, you know, lob your egg, and then disappear again. And Evelyn

was so clever that she could catch - you could get back in her car and you could catch the convoy before it got to Salisbury Plain.

And I suppose the relationships that you've taken through your life?

Yes, and there were women I would never ordinarily have met.

Yeah.

And things I would never have had the confidence to do. So, yes.