

Judy Harris

So, Judy, so how did you come to be at Greenham? How did that happen?

Um, well I was travelling, and I went to Australia, and I was working in a magazine factory packing magazines, and I used to read them while I was packing them. And I read this article about Greenham, and I thought oh, when I go back to the UK I'll go and visit there, because it sounded really interesting. And I don't - I can't really remember when I went to live there. I went for the Embrace the Base, which was I think I came back in the winter before that, like so I'd been back about a month in the UK. And er, I think I'd seen, I'd seen the UK differently while I was away, I sort of realised some stuff about colonialism, and how the British had behaved. And I remember coming back to the UK, and the way that - because I came back on a plane from India, and the way that the Indian people were being treated who had arrived, presumably they were joining family or something, I was just thinking oh god! (Laughs). And it felt like a very gray and miserable country to belong to. And I think one of the brilliant things about Greenham was it was such a laugh. We just had so much fun there. And so I'd thought, I'd thought I'd go and visit, so I went to that Embrace the Base. And I was just amazed by that, by how many people there were there. Because I'd been out of a country for, I don't know, a year and a half. So I'd felt like I didn't really know what people's thoughts were. And err, I hadn't expected it to be anything like as big as that - it completely blew me away, and made me feel very hopeful. I'd always been - I remember watching - what was that film? Was it 'When the Wind Blows', that came out in probably the '70s. And I remember watching that, and being really freaked out, and just thinking this is a really important thing, and being involved in sort of some demonstrations and stuff, but er, that it just felt like there maybe been a sea change in the way people thought about it, when we went to that Embrace the Base thing. And I thought oh I'll come back and see what it's like when there's not loads of people. So I think I moved in maybe January or February of the next

year, I moved to Yellow Gate. And I found it quite difficult to start with, because it felt like it was quite a tight group. And I've not really been there before. And I think the day that I arrived, some women had just got out of prison. I don't know what, what action that was. But it gradually started to feel more like a place to be, and as Jane was saying, it was just amazing. The different people that you met there, because she was an amazingly politically aware person for a 17 year old, but I don't think I was for someone my age. But I just learned so much stuff from just listening to what people were saying about how the nuclear industry worked, and how that related to nuclear weapons, and the whole militarisation thing. And there were some people who were very, very well informed, like Rebecca Johnson, who would just be talking and just be able to quote, loads and loads of stats and stuff, and you'd be like! And it felt like a very exciting and creative place to be, and like there was some alternative being made there. And that felt like, oh well maybe this country is quite an exciting place after all, which was really great.

So you'd had quite close together an experience of thinking I'm not - I don't, I don't want to be part of this place, or I'm not sure what kind of a country is and then, yeah, okay, this, this is...

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think I was in my head was in a bit of a state of flux, because I'd travelled around and seen people living in lots of different ways, and seen poverty in a way I'd never seen it before, because I was privileged, middle class kid. And I think that all made me very ready to be there, at that particular time in my life. I didn't have any kids or any responsibilities. I hadn't got a job to give up. So it was really easy for me. And I thought I'll go there for a little bit. I didn't think I was going to go there and live there. And because I'd been working in Australia, I could go and sign on in Newbury, so I had got an income to live on. So I could stay there. And then I was like, I don't know there just seemed to be so much to do there always. It was like, there was always stuff happening and...

How old were you at the time?

Er, I think I was probably about 24. Something like that, I'm so crap on dates and, when was that Embrace the Base - was that '82?

I think that was '82.

'82. So I'm born in 1957. So (counts to self), 25. Yeah.

So and did your parents not mind what you were doing? Or anyone else?

Well, I suppose for my parents, it was probably like oh, well, she's safe back in the UK now, because I'd been all over the place. And in those days, you didn't ring up, or you know, you got a letter sent poste restante, or something. So I think probably it felt to them, probably - oh well, she's back and whatever. I mean, I think they probably would have preferred it if I had come back and got a job, but I mean, they, I think they were a bit - my sister got involved in it as well. So that probably was a bit of a (laughs), er, you know, I think, well, after I was there for a while, it probably felt more of a thing. And I think it did freak them out when I went to prison, and it freaked them out when my sister got arrested, I think, but not in an awful way. I mean, they were very supportive from a moral point of view, but I don't think (laughs) - they never came visited.

Hoping that perhaps it might stop if it wasn't encouraged, maybe?

Yeah, I think they kind of just were a bit nonplussed by it, really. Err. Yeah, I mean, I don't know. They didn't express to me anything like 'Don't you think you should stop living there anymore?', or anything like that. But I'm sure they hoped that that would happen. (Laughs).

And so do you remember where you - you just turned up at Main Gate - Yellow Gate?

Yeah, I think I had a tent. I can't really remember, I know, I know at some point I had an orange tent that was on the right as you went up the main road, and then that got - then I moved out of that and I made a bender down in the woods. And then that that tent did get fire bombed at one point, because people used to come from Newbury, and they'd like usually just shout abuse and stuff, but occasionally they'd drive up and throw burning things, and that tent got burned down. But I think that was later because I think - I don't know - I know that bender was where Sarah had Jay, because she wanted to have him in that bender because it was quite hidden. Although it was pretty close to the road, it was quite hidden by trees and things. So I wasn't living in it at that point. And um...

So do you want to tell us a bit about Sarah and Jay?

Well, Sarah was, I mean she would have been there, I don't know, she was there when I got there. I don't know she was - and she was pregnant, and she really wanted to have the baby at camp - that was really important to her. Which she did do, and the midwives were great about actually because they you know, they were like 'Oh yes, I think we can manage in here you know', in this bender like the size of a peanut. But they were like 'Yeah, yeah, we just need to make sure that it is hygienic' (laughs).

And they'd just come.

They must just have been the bog standard...

Duty midwives from Newbury?

Because they had like normal midwife uniforms on, as far as I remember. And err...

I bet they were loving it.

Well, I suppose. Yeah. And then I think when she had him, she did go somewhere else, because they were worried about him getting cold at that point. But yeah, it's amazing, isn't it? I mean at the time, you know, it wasn't really on my radar that whole pregnancy and giving birth. I just sort of thought oh yeah, if that's what she wants! (Laughs).

They probably thought she's going to do this anyway. We should be there.

I think they were kind of a bit into it! (Laughs). And she was really lovely Sarah. She was very softly spoken, but a very determined person. She was great at discussing things with people, because she never got aerated. She was always really 'But don't you think this?' I can remember sitting around the fire, discussing things with - because loads of journalists used to come all the time, at that point to Yellow Gate. And oh god, you know they were always - it was always very difficult to engage the actual person, because obviously they're looking for a story, or looking for a person who's going to pronounce on the camp's opinion, rather than engage with you on a personal level about what you think and what they think. I can - I think that was one of the things that I learned a lot about when I was at Greenham - just about how the press works, and how stories get changed, and the way that - I can really remember one time when um, Sarah Hipperson was ranting at some journalist - like she just went off on one, and was just like talking at him for about 5 minutes without stopping for breath, just making point after point after point after point. And then she stopped, and he said 'Okay. Can you say that again for the cameras?' (Laughs). Like as if she hadn't said it already, because the camera wasn't on, and he didn't need to engage with it in any way. It was like very interesting to me all that stuff, about how the media worked.

So did you feel like er, the, so I think a lot of women have felt it was like a an enormous education. Did it feel like - did you feel like ooh, I don't really know what's going on here?

**At the camp?**

Generally, did you feel like you knew less, or that you had other experiences - about what was going on with the bigger politics, or even at the camp?

I think I definitely knew a lot less than some women there. There were some women there who were very, very informed about stuff. And got like, like, knew the whole kind of strategy of the American Air Force, and knew what the British strategy was supposed to be, and had actually gone and read stuff. Err. But I suppose I felt like, I felt powerful when I was there. And I think I was at a point in my life where I felt like well, I could do anything I wanted to do. Um. And that helped that. I'd felt like I was learning all the time. I don't think I felt like I didn't know what was going on. I mean, I knew what I was there for. But it's not a situation I'd ever been in anything really like that before. Just that whole way of trying to work out ways to get a message across, in a situation where that was quite hard. (Laughs). I mean there was some very, there was some very funny - there was a lot of joking about it, which was really great, but also that moved into the way that we did things. So I remember, I remember spending a long time one day making a sign to put up, because they had a sign on the inside of their gate that said, what the American kind of - I don't know what it would be - it was like their kind of mottos, USAF mottos on this thing. And it was all about honour and being quick to react, or something - I can't really remember. And I remember spending a long time trying to mix some paint so it looked similar to theirs, and making one for us that said some different things. And (laughs), I remember one - I don't know who that was meant to be for, you know what I mean? Because it's like once you got up to that point at the gate, it was only Americans going in, so they're unlikely to change their minds. But there was this one woman Jane - I can't remember - Jane might remember. She was older and she had a van. And err, she had this idea that on um, (laughs) American Independence Day, I think it was, or maybe it - I can't remember whether there was a Martin Luther King Day at that point, but anyway, she got this old ghetto blaster thing. And she got that speech 'I Have a Dream speech', on this thing. And she put it up really, really loud so that

**when they slowed down at the gate to show their ID, they had to hear this speech, but you couldn't really hear it at all, it just went (shouts loudly) 'Arrghghhghheeeeghghghhehghghgg'. And it went on for all of like half a day she had this thing on, until her van batteries are virtually drained. Just going (shouts loudly) 'Eeeruughgghhghhghaah'. (Laughs). But, I mean, we all had our own kind of little things that we thought oh, I'm going to do this today. (Laughs). God!**

Do you got any sense of where that kind of symbolic - it's like a lot of, a lot of the actions were was symbolic, art and were funny.

**Yes. Well, there was a lot, I think it was a - I felt that some of the best actions were when they just totally took the piss out of that whole idea of, you know, British militarism, and the state, and which is all totally connected with a colonial history, and men prancing about in ridiculous clothes and all that stuff. That to take it all seriously, I mean, it is really serious, but that isn't what's serious - what's serious is people dying, or not having enough food, because we're spending money on that stuff. But I think also it's quite good if you're frightened, if you make a joke out of something - that really disempowers it.**

I'm just thinking that you know, saying I haven't really experienced this before, and so then I'm listening and I'm thinking, well, has there ever been anything like it before or after, really? For that mix of learning, and also then just thinking about, you know, where does that mixture of art and, and humour and um, symbolism in the actions - and you said taking the piss - as I was set hearing that, I was thinking well, is it is it really because this is although there's all the other politics, this is all women over here, and those are all men over there. And that's part of the, the store of things we have to deal with masculinity.

**Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's true. And, I think that I have felt like there's been echoes of that in things - like there's a peace group in Sheffield that as it happens is mostly women, that has got some sorts of those ideas about making stuff that will show an idea, which often turns out to be making stuff in traditionally women's crafts ways, which are,**

you know, as we all know, not judged to be worthwhile in the same way that forging a rifle, or whatever you do with a rifle is. I think err (laughs), one of my favourite ones was the teddy bears' picnic one, where women had dressed up as teddy bears, except that got a bit loose. And then we were going, we'd got various bits of picnic, and we were - I can't remember when it was, I suppose it must have been sort of Easter time. And we had to climb, we had these two ladders that other people had put up for us who weren't going in. And then we had - there was barbed wire on the top, and you had to get over the barbed wire. But when you had like a tail and stuff, it was quite difficult to get over. And then once you were over, it was like, it was good, and we just danced about and then we sat down for this picnic, and there was quite a few different ones, different picnics going on. And my sister was in a different one. And she said to me that um, they got found by MOD with dogs. And these dogs were obviously not that well trained (laughs), because they were like trying to give them some food from the picnic, and the dogs were like, just and the MOD guys were trying to get the dogs to behave, you know, be like scary dogs, and they were just wanting to have some of the picnic! (Laughs). And then they started rolling these boiled eggs down the hill. And one of the MOD men said 'Starving children in Africa could have had those eggs.' (Laughs). But yeah, we got we were all like dancing around, and then I can't remember what happened after that, I think they just arrested us and chucked us out, and nothing else happened, I think. But that was very funny.

What was that your experience of the different gates?

Um, well they did feel like they kind of built up a character as time went on. I mean, at first there was only Yellow. And then me and a woman, Sue, we went around to Orange for what - we kind of had two things. One was we wanted a holiday from just that kind of incessant stuff, because you know that thing of visitors like there's a song that says, 'Where do you get your water from?' And that is one of the questions that you just did get very (laughs), it became very hard, you know, to, it's that thing where you become part of a group. And it's really important when you're in a group not to, to be open to people coming in and



everything, but it's actually very, very hard to sustain that, when people are coming all the time and asking exactly the same questions. And anyway, we wanted to break from that, but also it's like Yellow was on that side. And they could just take, do whatever they wanted to do on the other side, take things out, bring back in, we wouldn't have known, and we both sort of wondering if it'd be possible to move around to there as well. So we went for a week's holiday, and I can remember them being quite itchy about it. They kept coming and asking us if we were staying there, and we were like, we're just here for a holiday. And then we packed up, and then a few weeks later, we did actually go back and set up there. And that was, it was nice at Orange Gate - there was like, there was a gate there but it wasn't used that much. So um, it was peaceful in a way, not as like cut off as Green was. And there was some gypsies living down the road from Orange, like on a bit of land, bit further down, who, they were good -they (laughs) they had these lurcher things that they would go rabbiting in the base. So whenever they wanted to rabbit in the base, they'd shoot the lights out first. (Laughs). So then that was nice, because then it was darker, because it was always really light all night. They used to be this nightingale at Yellow Gate, and I can remember thinking, fucking nightingale, I wish it would shut up. So yeah, Orange - I really liked living there, and there was quite a lot of space to put benders and things up. And I lived there for a bit. And then it felt like we weren't really in the place we needed to be, because it was along that back road that they were bringing stuff out all the time. So then we moved round to Violet. And then we moved to Indigo, and I stayed at Indigo until I left. And that was, um, that was quite tough for Indigo, because basically there was the verge and that was it. Because on the other side of the road was the golf club. (Laughs). And I remember one time I was outside in front of Indigo Gate - in the morning I used to do Tai Chi in front of the gate, and this golf club guy drove past in his Mercedes and went 'Complete bloody nutter!', and wound his window up. (Laughs). But yeah, Indigo was a bit mad, because there was a very thin verge, and you had to be on there. And then there was - the MOD had, that gate was used quite a bit at one point, and they had their own little shack on the other side, and at one point, they started copying us, and they put a little thing up on the

outside their house thing that said Lazy D Shack, and they used to fry up eggs and things, but they obviously got told off one time, because that was all taken away, and they weren't allowed to do it anymore.

So they started making themselves at home, then?

(Laughs). Yeah, yeah. And sometimes occasionally, because the road went quite close to the base inside, sometimes soldiers would come and talk to you. And there was this woman, Mabel who oh god, she was amazing. She, I don't know - she must have been well into her 80s, because I remember her son really didn't like her coming, because he felt that it wasn't safe and stuff. And we were all a bit worried about her. But she used to come up, I don't know - every couple of months or something, and stay over. And I can remember her being at the fence, talking to these soldiers and just telling them off like - and she was like your Nanna, you know, they couldn't say anything to her. They would like bit shamefaced when she was saying 'You shouldn't be doing this,' (laughs). Because that was another thing that you learnt about, about the whole thing about the way that it worked to be in the army, and how you had to pay to get yourself out, and how that wasn't an option for most of the people in there. And the punishments they used to make and do when they'd done something naughty, like run around the base with a rucksack full of bricks and stuff - like just madness, that whole kind of...

It's like all of the factors of British society coming together in this one place, you know, gypsies, golf club, Nannas, lads who got no jobs apart from the army.

Yeah. Yeah. Well, that was, that was where I was when that thing about the permanent evictions was happening. And yeah, there were various methods - Annie had made this bender that was, it was a kind of a collapsible bender that you could pick up and walk away with. Well, that was the theory. It was like slats of wood, in a kind of teepee shape, tied together so that they'd kind of flatten out. So you could just pick it up and go off with it. And then Liz Galst made this bender on wheels,

because she was American and she'd heard about how you could claim sanctuary in a church. And she made, she made it was like two (laughs), two quite big pallets, and quite small wheels, really. And then bender on the top, and the thing what - her idea was, when they came to evict she would push the bender down the road to the church that was near to Blue Gate and claim sanctuary there. But the problem was it was actually quite heavy, so it sort of needed at least two women to push it. And one of the problems with being at Indigo was that you didn't have enough women, basically. Trying to keep somebody there all the time was really difficult. And err, so I think in the end, they did evict that bender. But it was very funny while she was pushing it up and down the road. (Laughs). I don't know if she ever actually went to the church, because once you were on the highway, they didn't do anything to you anyway. So I don't know what the response of the church was.

And how about the concertina collapsible engineering?

Well, that lasted for a little while, but then they got that one day. I think there was some days if they - because they used to usually go to Blue Gate first, and someone - if Blue Gate had a woman to spare, they would get someone to come and tell us. But if they didn't, then they'd come to us - because Blue Gate got it worse because they got no warning. But then after they were doing it all the time you kind of gave up on that, so you knew that you weren't going to manage to keep anything, so you were just sleeping out in Gore-texs and stuff. But they managed to get - and we had another theory at one point, which was that if if stuff belonged to other people - like visitors, that they wouldn't be able to evict it, and I can remember we had some chairs that a woman from Kent had written her name and address 'This is the property of Pearl Norton.' But they did evict them, unsurprisingly.

So what happened when you got arrested, and ended up in prison?

Um. Well, that was the No Names action, which was um, - because they'd um, they'd sent Ann down for - I can't even remember how long it was now, some ridiculous amount of time, 2 years or something, it was

some, something really horrendous. And um, I can't even remember why. I mean, partly they hated her because she was married to a vicar. And she was obviously stepping over some more lines that weren't acceptable. Um. But it was one of those things where they invoked all sorts of, you know, Official Secrets and conspiracy things. And um, we did an action where we didn't give our names. So we knew that they'd have to charge us and send us down straight away, because they couldn't bail us. And we didn't speak at all. Err. Which, the point of that was supposed to be to get some more coverage of that, what happened to her. I don't think it was highly successful on that front. And so...

Had there come a point where this have simply become a media war - it's like they're getting too much coverage. We've got to prevent them from getting coverage. So...

Who knows? I don't know, I mean, I imagine we were quite boring by that time. Because you know, things don't stay interesting in the media, do they? I'm sure there was some stuff discouraging - but like, and there was always quite negative stuff about 'Filthy lesbians, you just lie around in the mud', and stuff like that. (Laughs).

In their woolly hats!

Um, I don't really know. I mean, you were always trying to think of ways that you would cast a new light on something, or get to people that you hadn't got to before and stuff. Err. But who knows? I don't know.

So you were doing the No Names action?

Yeah. So we went in the base, but we didn't - um, there were some women cut the fence for us and let us in, so that we weren't found with anything on us. And um, and then, well we just went to prison. We went to court, and I remember the clerk saying to the magistrate, because we weren't speaking 'Madam you have to be satisfied that they can hear.' (Laughs). And I remember making eye contact with her, and

**me grinning, and her saying 'I am satisfied', and she didn't crack a smile at all. Yeah so then we got - I can't remember, 14 days I think it was.**

So was, did you feel, was it just contempt from the magistrate really? Just had no time for you? Or just doing their job? What did it feel like?

**I think I mean, what we'd imagine was that they would be pretty fed up, because they'd have to find bases for X number of women in prison, with no notice. And I think she was quite fed up. But I imagine that she sort of day in day out, I mean, she was a magistrate in Newbury, she would have spent so much time - I mean, we're all down there all the time. There was you know, because women used to come and go and give fake names, and you know, so they, they spent, they must have wasted hours of court time. I can imagine that must have driven them up the wall. Like Jane was saying that one - because there was that, the clerk I think he was called Norman, and I can remember one day being at court for some reason, sat there and he, he was walking through the lobby shouting 'Frida People, Frida People', and he had to do that because it was illegal not to, but he was really cross that he had to run around shouting (laughs). And obviously Frida People wasn't there. I mean, she was probably back in Australia or something! (Laughs).**

Like Bart Simpson!

**Yeah, it was a lot a lot like Bart Simpson. (Laughs). Oh god!**

Oh dear! (Laughs). So anyway, you were, you did the No Names. What, what, what was the actual action that you did? Can you remember? Oh, you were going...

**We just went in the base. I can't really remember, I think we just went in the base and walked around until someone picked us up.**

And then where were you sent to prison?

Um. Well, we went to Holloway to kind of get processed. And then they took me and few others to Cookham Wood. But there were - people were sent all over, because they obviously didn't have enough spaces. I mean, although nowadays they pack people in much more, so I mean, it's much worse now than it was then. Err, so I can remember going into Holloway and getting like you had to, you had to strip, and then you had to go like this and twizzle around, so they could see if you had any thing on you, or any birthmarks or anything. Like stand with your hands raised above your head. And then, then they said you could have a bath, and it was like, it must have been there since the Suffragettes - it was like a metal bar with feet. And they gave me about, like, I don't know, 4" of water or something. But it was quite nice to have a bath, because obviously it was quite difficult to have a bath at Greenham. Although we had bath women - we went to their houses. And that's all I can really remember about that. And then then we went to, in this van - which I've always - like those prison vans, I've always thought differently about those since then, because when I see them, I always think oh, there's people in there who are looking out. And that's like their chance to look out. And um, then they kept us away from other prisoners. They just put us in cells together, so that we didn't get to speak to anybody. And they, and they didn't - either didn't give us any exercise, or I think the one time they did, they did all the women from the camp together, and they didn't have anyone else - so they tried to make sure we never spoke to any other prisoner.

Why do you think that was?

Well, I think they thought that we'd be a bad influence in terms of discipline, and power, and taking power. And probably to a lesser extent, that we might make some links that might carry on, and learn things off each other. (Laughs).

Which did happen.

Yes. Yeah.

So they were right on that one.

Yeah. And then when we, when we go out, they wouldn't give us a travel warrant, I remember, because they said 'We can't give you a travel warrant, because you haven't told us your name.' (Laughs). So they made us, we had to hitch back, and I remember this guy picking up three of us up, that were going back to camp. And he said, like 'Where have you come from?', and Listy said, I think it was Listy said 'Shall I tell him?' and we explained it to him and I think he took us miles out of his way in the end, but that was quite a - enjoyed. I had quite a few - because I used to hitch all the time then, and I had quite a lot of interesting discussions with people when I said I lived at Greenham.

Did anybody ever say 'Out of my van, or lorry, or car'?

Err. No, but there was one person who was like really, really angry, who he didn't check me out, but I kind of thought it might have been better if he had. I mean, he didn't like attack me or anything but he was verbally quite aggressive.

My experience was they always knew exactly where you were going. If you were near enough.

If you were near enough, yeah, well and also the way you smelled, I mean, because I remember one time, I was in London, in Sisterite (spelled phonetically), and I was sort of around the corner from somewhere, and someone came in and said 'Oh, it smells like someone from Greenham's been in here.' And I kind of went 'Yeah, it's me,' and she was so embarrassed! (Laughs). Which I hadn't been meaning to embarrass her, because I could see that you did smell quite bad. You know, like, I mean, your hair was all smoked. And even if you washed every day, like your clothes were like really smoky. So you couldn't sort of not make it be like that.

So the general aroma was smoke, rather than unwashed-ness - that probably...

Well, yeah...

Overpowered all the others?

Well, you could wash, I mean, it was quite easy to wash - you could heat some water on the fire. In Orange Gate it was easy to wash, and also Ruth at Orange Gate made a shower, which was very nice. Um. But we had, when we were at Indigo, there was like women who lived in mostly in Newbury, or some in Thatcham, I think, who were like bath women, and our bath woman was called Audrey. And she, she did one time come to visit us. But I think she found that pretty difficult, but she used to like, so I think we used to go maybe once a month, once every couple of weeks. God, I couldn't stand that now, but it was something not that often. And she'd make sure there was hot water, and we'd go to the laundrette and wash everything. And then we'd go and have a bath, and then we'd have clean clothes to put on. And she used to give us a cup of tea and that, and that was - I don't think she was in any peace groups or anything, it was just that somehow other women had advertised for that. And she did that. And that was all she did. And I think there were other women who did it who were much more involved. But...

What do you think her motivation was?

Well, I mean, we did talk to her about that. And she, I think she felt that err, I don't, I don't know that she sort of totally was against the nuclear thing. I think she felt some stuff about the common being taken. And I think she felt that when you were doing something on principle, you should be respected, and that she was going to support it to that extent. There were quite, I think there were quite a few people knocking around who thought we were an eyesore, but still agreed that they didn't want American weapons next door to them.

What was the general vibe if you went down to town to shop or - did you feel generally like you were not wanted, or how did it feel?



Err. Well I didn't go to Newbury very much. Some people were okay, I suppose if you're going to the shops, people don't usually refuse to sell you things do they? I do remember being spat at in the street. And I sort of feel Thatcham was a bit nicer. There was, there was a secondhand shop in Thatcham, which Liz used to call (adopts American accent) the Old People Service Store, and I can remember going there, and that they were nice in there. But um, it wasn't like - we didn't really kind of go shopping or anything very often, I suppose. We'd go and get some milk and stuff, if we'd run out maybe, but we kind of mostly managed on what people brought. You know, there was such a sort of weird selection of donations and things. I remember when I lived at Yellow Gate, there was a van drew up from something like Fortnum and Mason, and there was (laughs) about 40 boxes full of tins of Linda McCartney asparagus soup, which Linda McCartney had donated, and we just ate this soup for day after day! (Laughs). Oh god.

So when it was time for you to leave, how did you know it was time for you to leave?

Well, I kind of didn't really. I mean, I think probably I'd, I'd sort of gone past my sell buy date, really. I think the last - there was that ten million women action, which I was very worried about, because there was a lot of discussion around that that felt to me, like it had turned into lunacy. Like that, like, women were saying 'Oh, well, you know, that means one in six women in the UK, has got to come, we can do that.' And I was just thinking no, we can't do that. And that whole idea about getting bigger and bigger being the way to go. And um, I can really remember Sue saying 'Do you think we're flogging a dead horse?' (Laughs). I can just, you know, like there were always those huge meetings that went on for hours. And you were kind of used to that, because everything had to be debated. And then there'd be another meeting. And it turned out to be a completely different lot of women who'd come to a completely different conclusion, then you'd have to have another meeting, (grumbles), I mean, we've all been in those meetings, haven't we?

Something about it worked, though.

It did, because there wasn't um, I think there wasn't a feeling that you had to get to a point where that was what you were going to do or say or whatever, because of that, no leaders thing. And because you could might do what one woman's idea was, and then another time you'd do what someone else's idea was. And it - there was, I think there was a lot of space for people to just say what they felt, without someone else feeling they had to argue that they didn't really feel that. Um. But there was also kind of, a lot of like these raging things about money, like who needed money for what. And then there was this thing of a money woman, where for one week, if you were the money woman, you had the money, and people had to come to you if they needed some. And they weren't, you weren't supposed to be making the decision about it, but sometimes you were, and I can remember being money women and it was a complete pain in the arse, because people would say to you 'I need this for some particularly..', some crappy thing that just felt they were entitled to. But then Arlene got the money book and threw it in the fire in the middle of one meeting, (laughs) which is probably a very good thing. But it did work. I mean but also there were loads of things where you just thought oh, well that was mad, but I know why I'm here. I know what I'm doing. So I'm just going to not take any notice of that. I've gone off track now. What did you say to me?

Well, I took you off track, because I said about the way things - it kind of did work. But you were actually talking about when you decided it was time to go.

Okay.

And you were perhaps a bit past your sell by date, and ten million women.

I mean, I think those meetings worked fantastically well in some ways. I can remember one at Yellow Gate, at that big piece round the side of Yellow Gate, where there must have been, I don't know, probably about fifty women there in a circle, which, you know, usually you'd say 'Oh, we

can't do that. You've got to have small groups that report back or something', wouldn't you. But we did that. And everyone was just lying down listening to each other. And it was a meeting that worked. There were other meetings that I felt didn't work - like, there was Wages for Housework came and stirred things up. And there were, there were times when it felt like different gates had got different ideas about what should be happening, and then that made it difficult. But there was also loads of stuff that wasn't, wasn't discussed in a meeting. It was just like, you know, particularly in the winter, I mean, you had to try and cook before it got dark. And then you'd be sitting there and talking about stuff and ideas would come. And it would turn into a plan from just chatting.

Which is another way of organising.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Organic.

Yeah. And then, you know, you might say 'Oh, we're doing this, do you want to join in?' No-one would say 'Oh, I don't think you ought to be doing that.' Well, occasionally that did happen, when there was arguments about who was a legitimate target, when someone put sand in a petrol tank of a - one of the contractors who was self employed, and it ruined his vehicle. There was an argument about whether that was or wasn't legitimate. But in general, it wasn't like - there wasn't an idea that you would say 'Oh, I think that's a really bad idea,' about something that someone was doing - you just thought they're doing it, and I'm not doing it, and that's fine. So it felt quite free in comparison with a lot of groups where it somehow feels like it's very important to have a party line.

I can remember, you know, every Channel 4 used to have the Labour Party conference on, and it was composite motion this, and that was the way things were done, and it all had completely hierarchical rather than 'You can do that. I'm not going to.'

Yeah, yeah.

So.

So yeah. So that that, for me felt a bit like aaah, I feel a bit like we've lost our way a bit here. And then there was also the miners' strike which was happening at that time, and um, Annie had organised this thing of walking from various valleys in Wales to Hinckley Point, to try and make some links about if you're not having coal, then if you're having nuclear you're, you know, that's no better - potentially a lot worse. In terms of, well in terms of everything, how that feeds into the military industry, and cleanliness and accidents, and du-du-du, and so I was involved in doing that, which was actually quite knacker. But we will also sort of involved in going down to picket with - because there had been a lot of links between like there was quite a few women from Cun (spelled phonetically) Valley came to Orange Gate, and there were quite a lot of links with various communities - miners' wives doing stuff. You know there were obvious links there. And we went down to Port Talbot, we went stay in Cardiff for a few weeks in that summer, and went and picketed at Port Talbot, and that was quite an eye opener as well, like the way the police behaved to the men on those picket lines was really violent in comparison to the way they behaved to us. Although there were single instances of people being really violent to women at camp, it wasn't the norm. And the people driving the trucks looked very similar as well. Like guys with dark glasses like... So yeah, we did that, which was knacker as well. And, but because I was away, I started just having an opportunity to think about, about it, and whether I wanted to carry on doing it or not. And I just felt like I'd had enough, really. So then I moved to London. I think I thought I'd go back for weekends and things, but I didn't. I think it felt for a while, like it was quite a hard grind getting enough women. There was a thing about trying not to have one woman on her own at a gate overnight. So I can remember having to walk around to Yellow to try and get some people to come round, so that there'd be enough people to keep that gate open. And then err, I think sometimes we just couldn't do it. So I'm not really very clear on

the pattern of how it happened. But I think gradually, some didn't have women at them anymore.

What did you do when you went to London?

Um. I did a um, building and construction course. Um. And I did lots of those ILIA, you know in those days you could pay £1 and do as many adult education courses as you wanted to do, which was just so amazing. So I did, I did loads of things like I'd moved, I moved into a squat of some friends that I knew - there was this Bonnington Square, it was like there were loads of squats there that it's now turned into housing co-ops. And I think I kind of thought oh, I'm living in a house now, I need to know how houses work. So I learned to do electrics and plumbing and bricklaying and stuff. And um, then when I'd done that, I was teaching at the free school, which is like a school where kids choose what they - not what a free school is now, but kind of like A.S. Neill, where the children choose what they want to learn. So I did that for a bit, because I'd already got a teaching qualification from before. Um, and then er, when I was working at Surrey Docks City Farm for a bit, and built a windmill with the plan that I was going to make it generate electricity and light the henhouse, but I never actually got to that point because we only got to the point where it was generating some power. And then um, what happened then? I think the money ran out for me to do that, and also a friend of mine was pregnant and was moving to Sheffield, and we had this plan to co-parent. And I was, I'd had enough of being in London, so I came to Sheffield. And that's where I am.