

A Day in the Life of a Greenham Common Woman.

When was I awakened to the dangers of both nuclear weapons and the fallout from nuclear installations? I was 14 when the first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on the 6th August, 1945. The first book my future husband gave me when we met in 1949 was 'Hiroshima' by American author John Hersey - a first hand account of 6 survivors. I was 19 and in my second year at Beckett Park training College for teachers in Leeds. On the 10th of October 1957 Britain's worst nuclear accident occurred at the Sellafield's site; a massive plume of radio activity, caesium and polonium spread across Britain and northern Europe. There was an immediate ban on milk produced by farmers over a wide area. Our daughter was six months old and we were living in the Cotswolds. In 1986 we retired and visited Oxford from our home in Halifax. When the radioactive rainfall arrived over Britain from the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant we were escaping torrential rain storm into the museum of modern art. Movement of sheep was restricted to prevent contaminated meat entering the food chain in the Welsh mountains.

I joined CND as an individual and was invited by the Halifax group to join them on a coach to Greenham Common in the early '80s. There was a huge increase in the numbers joining CND in the early '80s and the membership topped 50,000. Halifax CND was an active group and they invited Bruce Kent, 'the mild mannered priest' who was a leading figure and general secretary of CND from 1979 to 1985 and J.P. Taylor to speak at a large venue in the town. The hall was packed. During those years we marched through central London from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square - over a million, said the popular press and the BBC News, though the organisers who counted us out of the park estimated three million. Serious though our purpose was there was a great feeling of fellowship to be amongst others of the same mind. For the first time I saw men with machine guns on the roofs of the buildings. I was to see them again at Greenham. We marched for unilateralism but no government wanted to part from the policy of multilateralism which included the placing of American cruise missiles in the silos of Greenham. During the era of Reagan and Gorbachev a treaty was signed to reduce the nuclear weapon stock but left enough to destroy our planet several times over.

Greenham Common. This was the day we ringed the base. We left Halifax very early by coach arriving at the common late morning. I took photos using a black and white film which I later developed at home. Walking towards the base I noticed large executive houses and gardens along one side of the common where no doubt children played and rode their ponies before nuclear weapons arrived. The inhabitants appeared to object to the women in their permanent camp rather than the weapons on their doorstep. There were groups of women and children picnicking on the open grassland and woodland on the edge of the fence around the base. Babies knitted socks and tiny garments were threaded into the wires. Two fences, a few feet apart, surrounded the base. Some women, braver than me, were rhythmically pushing the outside fence to and fro until it was leaning over. Rumour had it that some women had got into the base using wire cutters and had 'played' on top of the silos. During the afternoon there was a signal for us to surround the base, hold hands and blow our whistles. A happy atmosphere prevailed in spite of the towers at intervals where stood men with machine guns. A frightened teenager, innocently walking along with us, was pinned up against the fence by a policeman on horseback. Returning after the weekend my 17 year old students already knew where I had been and pronounced me 'brave'. Subsequently I bought 5 copies of 'When the Wind Blows', 1982, by Raymond Briggs (inspired by a Panorama documentary) which confronted the trusting, optimistic Jim and Hilda Bloggs with the horror of nuclear war and the government's contingency planning. (Take down a door, make a shelter by leaning it against a wall). Briggs was praised in the House of Commons for its timeliness and originality. After leaving them in the classroom I donated them to the college library.

When we retired in 1986 we went to live near Grassington. There we joined the peace group begun by several Quakers who resisted the idea of joining CND. Amongst its number was David Knight who became the general secretary of CND from 1996 to 2001.

My black and white photographs show;

Halifax women arrive.

Bus park

'Grannies for Peace'

'Greenham Women are Everywhere.'

Picnics.

Police and Soldier.
Armed soldier.
Circling the Base.
Our Tent.
Tents and balloons.





There were other peace camps; tents became a graffiti covered caravan on a road to Harrogate. The American base which you will never find on a map is still there.







