

Anni Tracy

Er, yeah, so I was talking to somebody called Sue yesterday who was at Yellow Gate. And, and you had a little comment there about if you were at Yellow Gate. So I'd just like you to tell me a little bit about what the what the different gates were like.

Well, because I was very young and er, naive, inexperienced, I was sort of being led around really by anybody (laughs) who'd look after me. But yeah, I was at Green Gate and Green Gate was very friendly, and it felt to be a Yellow Gate, you had to be - I don't know, just pretty hard really. Yeah, I suppose. I suppose you did actually have to be pretty hard, because you were right on the roadside, and you were taking the flak constantly. The little haven in the woods of Green Gate was protected from a lot of that - we were close to the silos. But yeah, it was, it was much more relaxed I think.

And what about the other gates?

Because I went with somebody who went to Blue Gate, and they were sort of in my head - I don't know if this was actually the - what it was supposed to be, but they seemed to be their animal rights protesters, and vegans, and yeah, very serious sort of - all other campaigns as well as, you know, the immediate one that was in front of you. So yeah, maybe everywhere felt a bit tougher than where I was. I didn't choose to go to Green Gate - it's just the way it happened, I suppose. That's where we'd gone the first time we went, and so therefore, that was the place I headed for when no one went down to stay.

And what about any of the other gates? Did they have any feel to them about what what happened there?

I think one of them was a bit religious, but I can't remember. Want to say Lilac, or somewhere, somewhere a bit more gentle, the gentle end of the rainbow. But I can't, I can't remember. But we did a little bit of

visiting. I don't think ever walked all the way around. I know that was a mission at one point. But I don't think I ever did it. So you know, most of my interaction with Yellow Gate - Main Gate, was to go and get water. And if there was you know, anything, any major action happening up there that you know we were drafted into - to go - you know to go and take part in. I think I remember going to some sort of major meeting.

Can you remember what it was about?

No, I can't remember what it was about. I remember going to meeting in the Friends' Meeting House in Newbury. Very much about whether or not people who got arrested were going to go to prison - should go to prison, you know about like, you know, you weren't sticking up for what you really believed in if you if you didn't, but then you know, you're not there to be a number on the gate, if you do - so, yeah. Big debates about that. But not - that was that was definitely in in town. So I think that like the Yellow Gate thing now, when I go to Preston New Road, anti fracking site, that definitely reminds me of, of the Yellow Gate sort of thing because it's just so, just on the road - there's no no buffer really - hard place to demonstrate. Whereas Main Gate - at-least, you know, there was a bit of road side, whatever you call it - curb. A place for us to camp.

So, can you tell us your name and when you first visited Greenham?

So my name is Anni, Anni Tracy. I went with my sister, on one of the big actions - Embrace the Base, I suppose was probably what it was. I was 19 and doing nothing - on the dole. And my sister was at university in Leeds and the Leeds women were going to go down in the bus for this event. And I went too, and I think I did know before I visited Leeds that I was going, but I know that it was a secret, because it was supposed to be a big surprise mass action. And so I didn't tell my parents that I was going, so it was a bit of a surprise for them when we rang up saying 'Guess where we were today? And was it on the news and everything?' So, so, but I lived with my mum and my granny and, you know, definitely grew up in a matriarchy. And they were very proud

of the fact that we'd been there that day. So it wasn't that we didn't tell them because they wouldn't approve or anything. So that was at the weekend and I went back, signed on and packed a bag and went down the following Thursday, I think, after signing on - to stay - with one of the women from Leeds, who then went to live at Blue Gate. Helen, I think her name was. I sort of think she's got blue hair, but that's probably just the Blue Gate connection. She maybe didn't have blue hair at the time! So we hitched down, and I probably had never hitched before. I can't remember. But, but then that was - that was what you did. So I was planning on in Hull, and I was hitching down to Newbury and back every fortnight. So that's what I did. And it was patently obvious where we will going, and it's patently obvious where we'd been when we were coming back, because we smelt of fire smoke, and well probably other things!

And so was the fortnightly visit because you had to go back to Hull to sign on?

Yeah. Yeah. So I'd go back, sign on, wash my clothes probably, and er, pick up my money and go back. Spend a couple of days in Hull and then go again.

What year was that?

So it was '83. So it was the autumn of '83. And that was - so I was there when the missiles came in. And the only things that I have from that - then are, well the only actual big thing I have is a copy of The Observer, with an article in it written by Martha Gellhorn, and she came to, you know, for a visit and um, talked to various people and then wrote this article for The Observer. And she does refer to a conversation that happened that I was part of around the fire at Green Gate. And so I'm in, it, I know it's me and somebody else might know it's me. But you know, she describes me wearing things I wasn't wearing so it was interested from the perspective of this is how news is written - that people just have a conversation, then go away and write the thing without actually, you know, the fine tuning of the detail doesn't really

matter. I remember thinking, well, that's not right. Anyway, so I've got that. And then recently, some photos have come to light of a visit from Joan Baez, who came in the February of '84 and sang some songs. And then I was, and I wasn't there after that, I left and only went back for the odd week, you know, the odd visit really after that. And so it's - I'm sort of surprised that there are these things that happened at that time. But I think because that's when the missiles actually arrived. You know, that just coincided really that happened to be when I was there. But I've got no photographs of my own or anything, just this article in The Observer. And some diaries, some little comments in my diaries.

Do you know where those diaries are?

Yeah.

Did you have to dig those out to know where they were?

Well, I knew where they were. But I can't find one from '83, which is a shame. Because it would be really interesting to read what I thought when I arrived and you know, if I actually wrote honestly, which of course most teenagers don't really write very honestly in their diaries do they? But it would be interesting to find just a bit more about, about how it felt to be there. I felt very - I can tell you I felt like I didn't know what I was doing at all. And I knew that I wanted to be there, and it was the right thing to do. Er, I think maybe when we went for the day, so let's talk about basics. When we went for the day, um, for the big action, I probably didn't go to the toilet at all while we were there. So I had no concept of what toileting would be like. I think I'd heard about it, but hadn't visited it. I think the night we arrived - when we arrived to stay, um, we might have - Helen I might have slept under a plastic sheet over a twig. Like, and I mean that - it wasn't a bender. It was just, it was just, you know, just a triangular bit of plastic, because we arrived quite late and I'd taken a tent with me - a small tent. So it was probably quite late, and it was the winter so it was dark when we got there. And so I didn't really know anything about what I was going to - I don't think, visited for a day, didn't really know how food worked. I knew that people cooked

on the fire but yeah, it was all to learn. And so the next day I probably put my tent up really close to the fence, which you know, sort of visible from the fire. But, you know, very, very close to the fence which obviously later on became obvious that was a bad idea. (Laughs) As stones rained down on my tent and the squaddies kept you awake all night - me awake all night. But so then it's just sort of okay, so there's a tent with some food in it, and there's fire and there's you know, water and kettles, and we didn't really camp as children so you know my camping skills weren't massive - I'd done, been away with school camping a little bit, but nothing really so I could see that - I like fires, and I could see that looking after the fire is quite a good job, and quite an important job, so I did quite a lot of hanging around the fire and getting wood, and keeping the fire going and making sure there were kettles, with water. At some point, presumably, other than just going to have a wee behind a bush, I had to go and find the find the toilet! (Laughs). Which was commonly known as shit pit. And, yeah, there's just a pit with two planks over it. And, you know, once you've once you've seen it, you know, that's it, isn't it? It's like okay, yeah, that's what everybody said it would be, and it works as long as you're sure footed you're, alright.

So this was really a sense of not knowing - Greenham common didn't come with any instructions. You were just figuring out...

Well, yeah, I suppose it didn't come up with any instructions. And, and I mean, lots of life doesn't come with any instructions, does it? So I don't suppose I was bothered by the fact that, you know, there was no instructions, but I didn't really want to ask. That's, that's, you know, maybe a thread that runs through my life. But I do remember following someone (laughs) to find out where this shit pit was, and yeah, it was, oh, anyway, that's enough about toilets. But yeah, you know, I don't remember saying 'Well, where is it?' Or 'Can you show me?' You know. Or 'Can I do this? Or 'How do I do that?' I don't remember asking any questions - I'd just watch and then learn. And yeah.

And is that part of the whole thing about this thing as a kind of self organising system by women - that, that because there isn't an

induction, there isn't a leader, there isn't - you spoke about going to a big meeting about how does one - do you get arrested or do you pay the fine or whatever? How were the roles and rules and laws of Greenham figured out? Was it mostly just by doing, and everyone found their own way?

I think so. But I think there were, I mean, there were bigger, I didn't get too drawn into some of the, you know, should we go to prison? You know, I was just I wasn't going to go to prison. So, and now in reality, that would have been a wise decision. I could just cope with wandering off to the shit put on me own, never mind going to prison, you know. I probably felt like I should have more, more commitment, but I could understand the the argument that we should be standing up for our you know, beliefs and, and maybe we, we were the age that should be going to prison rather than the... but there are lots of ways of doing it. And there were some older women who within the greater network who were refusing to pay their taxes to pay for nuclear arms and the like, and in some ways that, you know, it's probably, you know - they were probably better equipped to make that decision than a 19 year old. So, yeah, I think that, that sort of acceptance of er, I would say anybody, everybody who turned up and, and my understanding that if you, you know, if you, you know, get stuck in and do things, then you will be, you know, you will be accepted as part of the family or, you know, you're useful or, you know, whatever. That's how, that's how those things work. And I don't think - I don't remember, I think, I think it felt to me like there were, that the people in charge were at Yellow Gate. (Laughs). But there was obviously a conversation about - there was conversation about what happened, and how it happened that filtered down to everybody - that everybody had a voice in that, yeah. And you could make your own decisions.

Was going off to Greenham - that, was that what all your peers were doing? Was this kind of common place, or was it a bit extraordinary when you went back home and told people what you've been up to?

No, I didn't know anybody else who, who was doing it, who did do it. I think that it was a, it is extraordinary in that it was out of the ordinary,

but I don't think anybody thought it was extraordinary. I think people thought it was weird. But I think I've been you know, I've been the weird person all my life. So, it what it did for me was to help me enjoy being the weird person, or at least accept it and say, 'I don't care'. And so no, my peers who'd gone to university mostly - or were in Hull, were going out to night clubs, and wearing makeup, and bothering about fashionable clothes, and I was wearing an ex-army parker and khaki pants, and large boots, and woolly jumpers and I never really went back to going into clubs and dressing up and all that stuff ever again I don't think. I'm not anything go out, but I know all of that thing - that I you know, my 18th birthday party you know, we'd had a party with my best friend whose birthday was the day before me at a nightclub. And there's pictures of us you know both with our Miss Selfridge, copper and gold lipstick, and eyeshadows and, you know crimped hair and it was great, but you know you a year later, well, 18 months later, that's not that wasn't me, that never was me again.

How did it feel when the missiles arrived?

It felt big. I can't remember where I was going, but I was walking down the road - the A, whatever it was, and I can't remember if I - why, but we just saw this huge aeroplane, and yeah we knew exactly what it was, and...um, (a phone rings) just wait for that to stop, sorry.

Do you need to answer it?

It's not me!

Is it me?

(Laughs). So yeah I felt big, felt a bit defeated, I suppose. I, I thought about that, because I thought it might be something that you would ask, but I don't remember what we did, I suspect we went and sat in the road and sang. (Laughs). But yeah, no, I'm not entirely sure.

You said that it was the right place to be, and it was the right thing to do. What was your sense of that at the time as why that was the right thing to do?

I think the whole political thing at the time was Thatcher. And so from being, you know, quite a lot younger, we'd been dominated by this, this whole political world that was that probably felt quite powerless to do until about really. And Ronnie Reagan and the you know, the sort of the escalation of the whole nuclear armament. For my, yeah, just seemed to - it was a place of feeling powerless over a lot of things happening that you didn't like. It felt dangerous, you know, it is hard to go back there and well, except for now, with Trump also being dangerous, you can understand some of that feeling. And, er, you know, going on a march every now and then CND march or whatever, didn't seem to be anything, do anything - feel constructive enough, I suppose as a political action, but then so go to Greenham and go, oh, here's something I could do. I, you know, it's hard to talk about how I felt then, but I think it must have just been like, well, I can do this - I'm not doing anything else. I was looking for something to do because I was just of stuck in limbo. You know, I wasn't doing - I didn't have a plan at that point. So, I'd never really been, other than Greenpeace been politically involved in anything party-ish, but also, but it's just, it's women, isn't it? You know, and, and that, that thing about like, look what you can do. I felt part of that thing I was, you know, obviously, I wouldn't have said I was weird. I was the oddball, I wasn't doing anything. And here was something I could do and be, be part of something and be included in something and be doing something. So it wasn't obvious at the time how important you know, or how big that would be as part of the historical landscape of, you know. So when my children say, 'Oh, you're part of history', or when other people say 'You're part of history, you go 'Yeah'. But you didn't know you're doing that at the time, did you? We don't know we were making history. So, so I suppose the feeling of belonging is you know, why does it feel like the right thing to do? You know, although when I talk about getting there and not knowing what, how, to how to be or what you know, what happens, I wouldn't have gone if I felt like I wasn't going to

be - feel okay there. So it must be, yeah, the general feeling of acceptance of community by those women.

And how - where do you think that comes from? You said he grew up in a matriarchal household. Do you think it was - do you think that comes from there, or was there a particular aspect to how you came across feminism?

Oh, is that what it was?

I don't know about? Maybe so?

I suppose the matriarchy will have some bearing on that. Yeah. But you know, I don't think that's what I was doing. I didn't think I was leaving one, you know, one nest to go and, you know, just to find another one. But, you know, if you look back at it, there's probably - it was important.

I didn't mean that so much as why, I'll just say, well, why was it important to you that it was women there?

Well, I think you're right, that will, that will have been why it felt so, well, not necessarily entirely - because other people who went there will have had the same - I'm sure will have had the same feeling, but not having come from, you know, the house I grew up in. So, I think women together...you do end up generalising quite a lot don't you when have these conversations? So it's like, you know, we create a much more, um, friendly and cooperative society, I think. But that is a generalisation and there are always exceptions to that.

I was wondering if you'd had any, any other kind of political involvement with organising with women or, or not women that made you think, or, was it just going along and thinking this is what I want to do?

Well not prior to that no. I mean that you know, I'd been on a boat with 39 women and you know, lived in close proximity with them for fortnight, but that's the only... no, I hadn't been anywhere else, or known that that

was a thing that, that would be call to me or anything. But that was a very you know, our house was majorly female. So, yeah I suspect there'll be an underlying feeling of feeling at home with women. That definitely continues today.

With the political actions, so apart from just the living at the camp, was there - how did you get involved in those things?

I can remember doing things, and it would normally just come about that there would be a conversation that something's going to happen, and so I remember blocking blockade in the gate at Green Gate, and, and that makes me think it might be the day the missiles arrived, or the day after, or whatever - because I don't know why we would have just chosen to go and do it - there must have been a reason for it. And it was just - it would just be word of mouth thing, you know, such and such is going to go in, you know, they're going to go in tonight. Yeah, that sort of thing. And, you know, there's no pressure to join in, but in some ways, it's a bit - for me, I think, what's the point in being there, you know, if you're not going to take part really. And so yeah, if there was a big event, I think people were a bit more careful just to make - because strangers would arrive. And I can remember having a conversation with somebody and thinking, actually, I think I've just probably spoken to the wrong person. But in general with people who were living you know, women who were living there - the discussion of a plan, and then you would either be join in, or, or not - as the case may be. I do remember standing and watching, the first time. Watching people sitting down in the road, thinking okay! (Laughs). Didn't know whether to join in or not.

What was that like? Did it look scary?

No, I don't think so. Don't think it looked scary. I maybe thought I hadn't read all the instructions yet! (Laughs). How to - how to not be dragged, dragged away by a police officer.

Do you think there were a few people turned up who were undercover or spying? And when you said, oh maybe I've spoken to the wrong person?

Yeah, I think I think I do remember, yeah, I think I talked to somebody who was probably a police woman. It wasn't when I was there. It was when I went back, maybe about the following September or October — might have been Halloween the following year or tow years later. Somebody was just asking a lot of questions. 'So what's happening? Okay, when - you know, how's that happening?' And afterwards you go - aah, okay, well also because there was a little bit of passing, passing the passing, passing it on sort of, just, you know, keep it close to chest sort of thing. And I thought, I think I might have just said too much. But again, that was partly due to having not been incumbent, you know, not been living there full time. I think you just forget. I don't remember really that happening when I was there in '83/'84 - '84 because, maybe because we were all much more sort of - it was a tighter unit. There wasn't, there weren't so many people coming in and going out.

Do you think that was difficult for the women who were there long term - to have, I mean, I heard the expression 'weekender', you know, to have, to have women just turning for a little visit and going away again and had to be introduced to everything - do you think that got quite difficult?

I think it, um, yeah, I think he's really wearing for people that are there solidly. And I think that, you know, I was aware of that. I remember doing a lot of talking to people who were just visiting, but then I did take it on myself to keep fire and stuff quite often. So you know if they came - if people came - I say people I mean women because we didn't have any men, even visitors that at Green Gate. So if they came to bring donations or or whatever. Yeah, it's quite it's a job that needs doing. And I think, I think, you did take that role off other people who didn't want to have to continually repeat themselves and engage with the weekenders or the day trip visitors. And, I probably got fed up with it as well at some point, but I don't think - with most roles everybody just rotated around. We used to make a bit of a plan as to who was going to

make the evening meal and, you know, there would be two people so it was never just one person had to do anything - do it all, but other than that it was - people just did things that needed doing. And I just, I think it's just one of those, you know, parts of that jobs list really.

What would you say a typical day was like?

Um, cold in the morning! Sit by the firework, wait for the kettle to boil. I mean, I think for me a typical day, and it's not necessarily, yeah of three months say - more days were wait for the kettle to boil, have some tea ,go and fetch some firewood, wait for the kettle to boil! (Laughs). Go and have a walk up by the fence and see what- have a listen, you know, going and help somebody make the tea, the supper. Chat, do a lot of talking, sing some songs. There was much more of that than there was cutting the fencing and trespassing on the base. But...

How important you think that was, that was just that daily life and that presence going on there?

Well, I think that, you know, that's where it came from, wasn't it? There will be a presence here that will, you know, protest. It wasn't, it wasn't started to be we're going to destroy it. It's a publicity thing - raise the profile. So it's really important, and I think for the, for the, um, for that to con...for the whole thing to continue, the, the basics have to be covered, don't they? So, you know, for people to live there, for those who did live there solidly, you know your basic needs need to be fed. So, food and water and heat and social contact, (laughs) all need to be covered, as well as all the political, bigger political conversation, protest, going to court - supporting other women who were taking it further.

What did you - what was your experience of of military police, or soldiers either American or British?

We had a lot of stories that would be passed on about who, who were okay. You know that Hampshire police were quite nice, but the Met

were horrible. And when we did a big action and we cut a load of fence down, we had the Paras, and they were really horrible. And, and when you think about the training that these people have, and the fact that you know, we were really close to, to the silos and you know, it's inevitable, isn't it really - of-course they're going to, they're not little pussycats are they? So, yeah, there was various bits of knowledge that was passed on about who would be okay. And you know, some of them, yeah, some people, you'd have a conversation with - they were bored mostly, if they wanted to have a conversation, they'd have a conversation with you. I think in the middle of the night when somebody is, you know, also bored and decides to throw rocks at your tent constantly, (laughs) then, you know, that's they're doing that on purpose. That's not only just, you know, it's intimidation and I think I got persecuted - well I put my tent there, didn't I! My choice!

Was, was a lot of the attitude was there a lot of misogyny? Was there a lot of...

Yeah, and if you so, you know, look back at what it was like in 1983, 1984 in the world in general, you do you realise that it was a different - it was a different world, and people do talk to everybody differently. You'd get - most of it would be from just people driving down the road. So you walk into town to go to Sainsbury's or whatever, you know, the vehicle. Yeah, you get a lot - you'd get abuse from just ordinary people as much as from the police and squaddies.

And was that on balance - did it, was there a sense that everybody in that county or near that town wanted...

Yeah, no, I think we just thought that everybody in Newbury and Berkshire hated us. Which you know, in, in reality, if you think about it, it can't be true, can it? And there were women from Hampshire and Berkshire who came to camp, but I think they were highly under pressure as well, because they were -yeah, and also probably in a minority as well.

What about the ones who were friendly and supportive?

Who - the soldiers and squaddies?

Quakers.

The Quakers, oh yeah.

What was it like going to Sainsbury's? Would the checkout - people at the checkout be...

Well, they've got to take your money haven't they? You know.

But did it feel that you were not wanted everywhere you went?

Yeah, I think so. Yeah. I think that's the way I felt, but then, like I say, I spend a lot of time, feeling that I didn't fit in anyway, so it wasn't new to me and I might have assumed that, rather than totally felt it - so it might have been a bit about - so it's like going back to the hitchhiking, you know, a really posh car picks you up, and you know, you try not to tell them where you're going. But like I say, you know, you're fairly obvious. So at that time women moving around - hitching, yeah, dressed as we were - who we were, and where we're going - they wouldn't pick you up unless they were, you know, interested to hear.

And, and did you get aggression from those people?

No. No, not in general.

So my experience was that, was the people who picked us up - men who picked us up, were interested and, and on balance supportive. Because otherwise they wouldn't pick you up.

Exactly.

We never got picked up by somebody who just wanted to harangue us. I think there was one lorry driver who just wanted to do a lot of talking, and you're very wary because because is this going to lead to telling us - do we have to have a row, and all the rest of it? And he ended up showing us which gate to get out at and all sorts. And I think maybe that's part of the, the feeling in the, in the country was not the same as the feeling in around Newbury where jobs were dependent, or whatever - that there was, there was actually quite a lot of support for what was going on, in unexpected places.

And I think that's always the case, you know. Looking, looking back, you know, or in recent experiences elsewhere. And yeah, yeah, there were, there are - it's not always, you know, men just slagging off the women or you know, it's not, it wasn't just the women's fight, obviously. And so to assume that everybody thinks the opposite is, is wrong, and you have to remember that. I agree, you know, picked up by, well, it wasn't a dustbin wagon, but it's practically a dustbin wagon - I was nearly home once, and okay, you're in Yorkshire, it could, you know, it's not as obvious necessarily where you've come from. But I agree, I don't think that any of those men would have picked us up. And they'd just have told you to get out. They'd just have dropped you off straightaway. They won't drive people around, either to have a fight with them while they're driving, because that's not - they don't want to do that do they? Or, or, it's helping isn't it? So they're not going to help you by giving you a lift, unless there's some sort of either agreement or support or, or, you know, or neither, you know, lack of opinion either way. But yeah, closer to the base there's all the, the point of the thing, which in this case was the base, there's jobs and livelihoods and more real things for them to be wary of losing. So.

I did get picked up by somebody who turned out to be an RAF fighter pilot. (Laughs). That was probably the oddest of the lot. But I think, does it, does that sense of if you look back now, do you think okay, so there was, there were more allies than you were aware of at the time? And part of the thing about being an activist, especially when you're young is, is er, kind of work, work yourself up into being able to do these

extraordinary things and, and, and, and that you're not aware that there might be quite a lot of people who would be supportive? You feel more alone than you are?

Well, in my experience, I probably did feel, you know, far more alone than I was. And somebody recently has said to me, um, I was always extremely um, he didn't say proud - what did he say? I can't remember. But, you know, but along those lines of, you know, amazed, you know, and that I'd been there. I didn't know him when I was there - it was afterwards, but it was, and it was somebody from a background, like, you know, I wasn't telling anybody that I'd done those things, because I, you know, self preservation. I was like, you know, that's something that happened before. It didn't, you know, it's not part of this, and I'm not talking about it.

Is this is a friend who said they were proud of what you'd done?

Yeah. And, and at the time when, you know, when he found out that I'd been there, said, yeah, but I don't remember. He never said that at the time. I didn't know that until, like 30 years later. So, you know, it's like, well, I didn't know. Yeah, really...all the time I was still sort of keeping it quiet, really, that I'd done this - because I was in an environment where, you know, a lot of people would have been very hostile, in my opinion. So I didn't talk about it, and every now and then someone would say 'Oh, apparently you were at Greenham common?' And I'd go 'Yeah. Why?', like so what sort of thing, what's it got to do with you? That's totally irrelevant to this world that we're in at the moment. And just shut down the conversation. I never felt it was coming from a place of like, wow, that's amazing. You know, I'd really like to learn more about it, because I, you know, I suppose it was like, oh, they were just a bunch of lesbians, weren't they? You know, and all of that sort of classic, how to 'dis' this thing that happened - well was probably still happening at that time. And you know, I just thought that's where the conversation is going to go. So, I'm not going to, I'm not going to have it.

And you've found out since that perhaps there were...

That maybe more people weren't actually going to say those things and I was, you know, I was going like, 'Yeah, what, and?'

And those stories being effectively how it was covered by the press?

I suppose so, because how else would anybody, you know around the country, know anything. The world is different now, isn't it? I mean, you can't move for information getting from one side of the world to the other immediately now, whereas, you know, yeah the telly and the newspapers ruled supreme at that point. And the web, the telephone tree!

Well, I was thinking about you, you said, you know, you've got this copy of an Observer magazine that was...

From 1984.

From 1984. And you asking your parents if the - did you see it on the news? That's where we were yesterday. Um, it was it was a time before mobile phones.

Absolutely.

Wickable fabrics.

Oh gosh, wickable fabrics indeed. I remember somebody coming with a, so there's this new, this new fabric you can make a bivvy bag out of it's called Gore-tex. And that's a funny word for fabric. And it was new - Gore-tex was new. And it was just being introduced as a, as a, as a, you know, waterproof, breathable thing in 1983.

But how did - it's astonishing to look back and think, well, how did - you know whatever it was 300,000 I don't know, women get organised without mobile phones or email? And I think we we forget. We can't remember what that was like. So we just - you have to get people in on

the landline. You know that concept - we forget that that's actually how things got done.

Yeah, so it makes me think that maybe the women's group thing was a bigger thing at the time - Reclaim the Night, women's groups as a sort of social network of things happening, you know, because if, if I went down with the Leeds women, they were obviously a group, you know, that would meet together to do political actions, presumably. And that might have been from, from the university - I don't know if it was based at the university or elsewhere, because it wasn't my group. But you know, I suppose those things were more widespread, and more commonplace in a way that I suspect they aren't now. But, but that's how do you find - how do you get a load of women together? Well you find out where they congregate, and you contact them there. But I think the thing about Greenham, so like when you know that initial spider's webbing of the, you know, the fence and hanging pictures of your grandchildren on - that's one of the things that I think the world was probably surprised at. But it was really great that it wasn't just young women, angry young women, it was all women. And so the Women's Institute, and the Quakers and the knitters, and everybody turned out didn't they? You know, it was for all women. It wasn't just for the animal rights protesters, and the vegans, and the lesbians. Although there were plenty of all of those things.

Did you find - again, was that something that you, so those kind of activists...

Did we have that word then?

Er, well, that's what they were, so the, the...

I didn't know any political activists when I went. I didn't know that I could be one or that I may even be one. But I don't even know now that I was one, but in Hull I didn't know any, any women you would you would call a political activist - at the age of 19. I'm sorry I interrupted you.

No it's okay. I was just thinking what's it been like since then?

(Laughs).

So, so, not only the experience is completely different, as in camping by some nuclear weapons.

(Laughs). Ooh, let's go camping by some nuclear weapons!

But also at 19 meeting a whole load of women from entirely different backgrounds from all over the world. What was that like, then?

It was great. I, you know, I continue to tell people the stories, you know, and, just little, little bits of people's conversation that, that that happened there. And so although you don't, you know, don't you know, think about that all your life do you? But I know that that obviously must have had quite an effect on me.

Do you mean there's an education or shaping your own view of the world?

Probably both. I met, you know, because at Green Gate, who seemed to be the congregation point for all the international visitors. You know, women there from Australia and Denmark and Germany and numerous other places (laughs), America. And again, you don't think about, you don't think about what you're doing when you're doing those things do you - it's only afterwards, or 35 years later, you can go that was quite incredible really to hear about, well see that it's important enough for them to want to be there. And you take a little bit of them away with you.

Did you find things like - I mean, I'm going to give - like you said, I didn't know is that what we were - activists? Do we use that word? So there were more things going on there than the nuclear disarmament, there was internationalism, there was animal rights, there was veganism.

Yeah so I know that I learned about the, the you know the, the struggle for rights for Aboriginal people in Australia by talking to those women there, you know never occurred to me that the same thing happened in Australia that happened in North America with Native Americans. You know, it's just that sort of putting things in place that, and everybody had their own thing. And as with a lot of - well everyone had their own thing that was most important to them. And then some of the some of those other things, you know, became more important to the people through being there and meeting other women and you know. Yeah. For some way some women it might have just been women, you know, the struggle for women became more important because they found themselves there doing this strange thing in the middle of their lives and you know and then and then beginning to realise how women's voices you know aren't heard - weren't heard. Think a lot of people's lives changed who were maybe a bit older than me. Mine changed even though I didn't know it was going to change because I hadn't really become anything yet. But yeah, I think a lot of people's lives changed by going as older women.

Do you think that went in both directions - that some women went there specifically because of solidarity with women, or because they were lesbian, whereas others found that while they were there?

Well I can say that I think that was probably true, but like I haven't got any evidence to support it, that's just you know, just like it'll be inevitable won't it? Yes and women were, were definitely fighting that fight already, and yeah as as with all activism people are attracted to the place where their voice can be heard - their fight can be taken further.

If you had a most vivid memory of Greenham, what would it be?

I don't know. I suppose the, you know, the the bits that I've talked about, since then, are the bits that they're almost like photographs, aren't they? Once you've talked about them, they become more, you know, more evident. So you remember them more than others. I, yeah, I don't know. I don't think there's anything that really that's greater than anything else.

I know I loved being part of that community and being accepted into that family and all the things that go with it. One of the oddest things that happened I suppose was I was taken - in I was arrested and taken into the base on my own. And I think it was like the September time after I'd been there the previous winter, and I was there for like a week or a fortnight and I was just you know, probably just went for wander on my own, went up to the gate, and where we we'd cut the holes in the fence, they just sort of stuck it back together again. You know, used to patch it back together again with little metal clips. And on the on the actual gate where it was sort of harder fence, rather than just the chain link, they used these little, just a little bend, like a U-shaped piece of material, just crimped on really, and a lot of these were loose, and so I was just standing there. I can't remember why - if I was just mooching around, or if I'd gone because something was happening, and I said I'll go and have a listen. I think I'd probably gone and said 'I'll have a listen, nobody will take any notice to me. And so just played with these bits of fence, and they were pinging off because they weren't really on properly. They're on the bits, you know, the, the loose bits of fencing and, you know, so they fall to the tarmac with a tinkle, you know, a few bits of tinkling metal falling to the ground. And, and I know I wasn't on my own so at some point, I was joined by other people, and it was obviously some sort of conversation about criminal damage going on. It's not criminal damage. It's not even attached to the fence. You know, typical just so - I'll just have an argument you know, me, not them. Not those on the inside, not the military police anyway. I remember somebody saying 'Let's just go for a little walk', and so I was sort of taken by - you know, surrounded by women - 'Let's just go for a little walk', and we sort of headed away from the gate and they came out and arrested me took me in the base. So nothing had happened. Nobody had cut anything, you know, but I was in the base on my own for nothing really, you know, just for nothing. And I was just sort of thinking, I don't know what I'm going to do now - I've got to try and work out what to do. (Laughs). Because I'd - when we'd been arrested in the previous winter, like three times I think - I'd used three different names. And if I just chose one off the top of my head, it was bound to choose one of those again. And just like oh - all hell breaks loose at that point. So I sat there

on the floor, for a while, said 'I don't have to tell you this, don't have to tell you that', you know, just refused to speak to anybody really, for quite a long time. And eventually they (laughs) they said, 'Well you do have to tell us your date of birth, because if you're under age then, you know, duh duh duh duh duh duh', and it was like, okay, well, I can get out of this then by using my own name - couldn't prove who I was, but if they checked out they could find out who I was if I use my own name. So, you know, six hours later (laughs) or something, I finally tell them. We work out what the problem is here because I look like I'm 16 presumably at the age of 20, or whatever. So or 19. So yeah. So it's quite an interesting story for me because it was the only time I was totally on my own thinking, right, how do I get out of this one? And so that's what I did. I can't even remember being let out - maybe took me out to the out of the Main Gate. I probably did have to go out of Main Gate.

So when the women said let's go for a walk...

They could see what was happening, they could see that they were twitching and the other side and they were going to, you know, fairly obvious to all of us that nothing was happening really - I wasn't - it wasn't criminal damage but but I think it might have been Zol actually one of the Aussies.

But they were trying to walk you away from them arresting you, but...

I probably stayed too long. I probably didn't think it was going to happen, and others - they just said 'Okay, let's go for a little walk now.' And then we just like, stuck me in somebody's bender out the way but we didn't get far enough away. So, so that's the story that I - I don't know what the moral of the story is or anything. But yeah, my automatic reaction to just sort of say, you know, Fiona McCloud or whatever, you know, it's like, no - be yourself because actually I knew that there was no record against my name.

And if you gave a second, if you got done for a second, then you...

Then yeah, may have to go to court, or they could keep me longer. Probably leaving the next morning.

Somebody who turned up not knowing the rules, you had learnt the rules of how to talk to the police, and what to tell them, and what not to tell them. And how did that all come about? Did you prepare before actions, or did you just learn it on the hoof?

I don't think we have a conversation about whether or not you gave your own name, but I remember on the on a mass action when lots and lots of people were being arrested, we were all taken up to the Newbury race course, because there was nowhere to put everybody. And so we were all sort of, you know, corralled in different rooms, having your photo taken and all this sort of stuff. And I was thinking, and actually yeah, I learned by my errors, really. I remember saying to somebody 'By the way my name's this', but talking to them with the name I knew them by, you know, so do you know what I mean? It's like, oh, I've just you know, used your camp name, and actually you may be giving them an entirely different name.

That's 'Don't tell them Pike!' (Laughs).

Exactly. Exactly. 'Don't tell them Pike!' (Laughs). Exactly. And it wasn't very loud, but you know, it was it was...

Did she give you a look?

No, we were on the floor next to each other. Yeah, had handcuffs and so from turning up and being like, I have no idea how this works. Yeah, yeah. Been in the back of a black maria, in handcuffs, banging - making as much noise as possible - banging the cuffs against the thing! (Laughs). Ah, dear.

And what did the parents make of all this then? Because this is a different level up from just going to a camp, isn't it - getting arrested and...

Yeah, I still think it was okay. Never got the feeling that it wasn't okay. Although having left at the beginning of '84, I went to get - I went to go and do some work and you know, do a job, and I think that was definitely a - 'Well, when are you going to get a job?', you know. And it seemed like a good idea, because I think - I thought if I go back to the camp, I would probably - it's my nature to want to get stuck in. So therefore I probably would have been arrested more, and I probably would have ended up in court. And I didn't really have any plan as to how that would of- you know what happens next on that one, really.

Did that feel like it was time to go, before you...

Ended up in prison? I think I mean, that was what I was using, either as an excuse or, or the reason to stay away for a bit. Yeah. I did think I needed to stay away for a bit so I didn't end up in prison, but I don't know if that - yeah.

And did it feel like - so maybe work was coming along that hadn't been coming along and...

Well, I went to work in an outdoor centre. So it was another running away to another little world! (Laughs). Um, I think at home - well you can't just stay on the dole all the time. What are you going to do? You know, what are you going to do? And so if it wasn't, if it wasn't going back to Greenham, yeah, what were you going to do? And if, yeah, I think the encouragement was to get a job of some sort, and I couldn't really do anything, you know. Worked Saturday job in a bakery. You know, there was no way I was going to fit into that little box of, um, working in a shop or anything you know, that home would suggest would be work. Work in Hull would be like working in a shop or working in a factory. So yeah, I went to work for an outdoor holiday company.

And when you left Greenham, did you feel like you were leaving Greenham, or?

I don't think so. No. And so going back to stay for like a week, or a couple of weeks, you know, felt like going home. And it was really important to do it, I didn't - I don't think I did it enough. But I don't know why I didn't feel like - maybe because the missiles was there? You know, maybe it was like well we were there to try and stop them. And so it didn't feel like that was the - I don't know, I have no idea where I didn't think going back to stay for longer after that, because the following winter I was also on the dole. So you know. I went back - I took somebody who I'd met in the summer whilst I was working in the outdoor world. And um, yeah, don't know, didn't know why it felt like - well it didn't feel like the important thing to do anymore.

Was - I've seen the photos of you in the, in the...

With Joan?

With Joan. Do you look back and think that - I mean, it's a bit extraordinary really, but was everything extraordinary?

Yeah, I don't think I, I you know, I didn't know how extraordinary that was then. And that's, you know, that's the end. That's the whole thing is it's like when is that? Well, it was an extraordinary as in it's out of the ordinary, but I didn't know that. Other people knew more about Joan Baez than I did, I'm sure - so it felt more - it probably felt more amazing for them at that point than it did for me. You know, it was as important to talk to the striking miners' wives who'd come from, you know, their communities in Yorkshire with donations - when you knew that they had no money. And they were bringing donations down to us, because they'd have been on strike for months on end. You know, that, that sort of - that felt more, or as important - you know, to celebrate as some musician coming and signing songs with us! I wish I could remember what she sang. I suppose it's fairly predictable, really. We probably all sang 'We Shall Overcome', together.

If you look back, either from a big political perspective, or just in relation to your own life, what do you think the legacy of Greenham is? I mean, do you think there is a legacy? Do you think there are things happening now? Do you think we've lost sight of it because we haven't been watching it?

I think there's all sorts of - you know, I think if you look, there's all sorts of threads aren't there? I have only looked at my life very recently as to what you know what effect it has had on it, and I think it's you know, it's probably pretty massive. So very close to us here we've got the anti-fracking site at PNR, and the fight against fracking in Lancashire has been led by women. And it's not women only but you know they sort of identified themselves as the 'Nanas' and you know, started wearing tabards, and you know - there's got to be some parallel there to what happened before to go like - well, you know, we can do this, and we can do it. It's not the first time this fight's been had, and we know it can be effective. And yeah, there's got to be a parallel. And that's great, because it gives, you know, it gave them the confidence to say 'I am going to do it'. I think if it was a women only camp, I think there are things that have happened that may not have happened had it been women only set up. But the women are leading it. Definitely. And that's really good. So yeah, 35 years later or so years later, or 30 years later, there's still the identifiable things that you can say this may have been different had that not happened.

I read something recently about how many times the - Emmeline Pankhurst put - tried to get the law changed, and how in relation to her like - she'd spent her whole life doing it.

Yeah.

And, and so she was in her 50s or whatever, which is, um, the same kind of age as 19 year olds of Greenham are now. And I don't know where I'm going with that really. But just just thinking about the, what the

question is about legacy, and just well, how does legacy actually work? Is it some big thing that you can point to? Or is it, um...

I think for me, so I left there and went somewhere to do a job that, you know, ended up being an entirely different job. I was, you know, working in this outdoor centre initially in the kitchens, I was supposed to do something else after the first six weeks, but it was pointed out that there weren't any women instructors. There were only men, and they asked me if I would be a woman instructor, a woman instructor - the woman instructor, the female instructor. I was telling someone this yesterday, and they wouldn't even dream of not having at-least one woman within that team now in those environments. So as I like 'Right. Okay, yes.' (Laughs). I wasn't highly qualified - I'd had a go at all the things that happened there - we did a bit of canoeing, and a bit of sailing, and a bit of archery. And, you know, it was just holidays for seven year olds upwards. So it wasn't to any great standard. So I was like 'Yeah, I'll do that'. And so and felt like I took a lot of stick doing that, taking that job on. I then went into, you know, sailing on bigger boats world, and there weren't many women doing those things, and I took a lot of stick there. And you know so yeah. I suspect I wouldn't have put up with some of that stick, or maybe even fought back as hard as I had done had I not had the education I had at Greenham. Maybe never would have thought I could do it. Or maybe just not said yes. I suspect, you know.

And you ended up sailing...

Across the Atlantic. Well, yeah and skippering yachts. Taking young people sailing. But I went to a job interview and I was asked if I could use a spanner. You know, in 1992 maybe, you know, (laughs) still just - I was just as speechless as I am now, you know. 'And can you use a spanner?'

On your head?!

On your head! Absolutely.

Bolt cutter. I'm quite good with the bolt cutters, sir!

Yeah. And the whole, so then my life has gone on to be filled with women really. In 1996 somebody suggested that I joined a women's community choir. I won't get through this without crying.

Okay.

And so I went to join this women's community choir, and I'd describe the feeling of going there as coming home. And it's only because we've been talking about this, well and the photos of Joan Baez that have appeared, and then talking to other - and now connecting with some of the people in the photos, that the feeling of coming home - of joining this choir, wasn't about singing as much as it was about being with women. And we did sing a lot, you know, and we probably even, you know, that women's group in Southampton - we probably sang some of the songs, you know, or a song that we'd sung in Greenham, so no wonder I felt like I'd come home. So I did that for six months, and then moved away, you know, it was only a once a month thing so it was like I'd just found that a thing and now whoa, got to go away from it. So started a women's choir here, which still exists.

Over here is in Lancashire?

Aye.

And it's not just one women's choir is it?

Well it's the only one that's specifically women. So yeah. So yeah, I insisted, when I met another person who wanted to sing, and ended with four people, because she knew some others, and I was new. So we just started on our own, because the one that that was maybe happening didn't. Yeah it folded. So we just started it on our own, and it's got to be women and you know, I somebody else said 'Well, maybe it doesn't?' and I said 'No, no, it does. It does have to be women.' (Laughs). And yeah, so that started in 1997 and it's now 2019, and it's still going, and

I've been running it for the last 16 years of that time probably. Yeah, and it is my you know, so now that is my job. I lead community choirs, I do other musical things, but um, that's a big part of my life. And it may not have been like that had I not gone to Greenham common, you know? Because that that feeling of that importance of that bunch of women. You know, and how that feels together when you sing together, and you just commune together once a week. And, you know, it's really good for everybody. So...

And your community choir goes and sings at all sorts of..

Yeah, we turn out for various charity dos and fundraisers - it's not particularly to perform. It's all about going home feeling better than you did when you came out, when you've been together for a couple of hours in the evening, but it's not - it's political in its own way, but it's not purely there for singing at rallies.

But you do sing at rallies?

Well yeah, and I've now started a political choir that is also at the moment all women, that you know we turn out and we go and sing at demonstrations and down at Preston New Road, and for the guys who went to prison - the anti fracking site. So yeah. So it has its own little rebellion still going on through song.

Am I allowed to say...You can't kill the spirit...

You can't kill the spirit! (Laughs). Yeah, you can't kill the spirit. I wonder if it will ever not go on and on, when will it be allowed to stop? It sounds like I'm talking about it in a very flat negative way. But, um...

That is a song that goes on and on and on. It kind of has its own problem built into it, doesn't it?

Yeah.

But I don't think that's what you were saying - you were saying...

Yeah, I'm saying about the whole thing about leading choirs, and the fact that I might not have ever done that had I not done what I did in 1983. That's an extraordinary thing as well. I don't know that it is, but people tell me regularly how great it is. And that without me it wouldn't be there. And, you know, would never have been as it is. Because they weren't as clear as me about what it needed to be. (Laughs). And it certainly wouldn't still be there if it wasn't for me. So yeah, I have to, I have to say, yeah, it is great. And it's a community of women and they look after each other, and you know, singing is the thing that brings them together, but it's about many other things. So I don't know what - I always find legacy a bit of a funny thing. It's like what does it really mean? What is the legacy of? So I reconnected with er, um, Silver - one of the Aussies, via Facebook, not - didn't have to write a letter to Tasmania. I could send a message to somebody, and a picture of Joan Baez, and both she and I on it, saying 'Are you the same Silver Moon that's on this picture?' And of course she was and, the Extinction Rebellion people have just got a song going out called Emergency - Climate Emergency. And it's been sent out to me through the Natural Voice network. The woman who wrote it came to our gathering and said, you know, 'Here it is. If you want it, teach it to your singers, and if they are, you know, party to joining in the Extinction Rebellion gatherings, protests, whatever, you know, here it is. Let's just have it out there.' And Silver to move out of her house because of the recent fires in Tasmania, and so she didn't know if her house was still going to be there when she got back, and you know they had to - yeah. So I sent her this song, because there's a recording of it and it's available, and Blythe Pepino wrote, it doesn't want anything for it is just like you know - sing it. And so I sent her it and said 'You know you may be - this is happening, you may find it - you know you may know people who want it', and so she sent me a message back saying 'It's great, I sent it on to the to the important people in the know.' So like, you know, across the world it's now, yeah, this song from here has gone out there, and no doubt will travel further. And I felt like you know that wouldn't be there. You know those connections, so it felt like quite a good thing to do.

Because well partly yeah I thought of Silver because there's a line in the song that says yeah you know your houses are all on fire, you know so it was - it felt like it was talking about her. There you go. Some of the legacy.

It's the same old planet.

Same old planet - everybody's still fighting some fight or other. Or is it the same one?

Kettle? Shall we tend the fire?

Sing a song? (Laughs).

On which note, thank you very much.