

Dr Janet Smith

It was a moment in the women's movement when, I think the first kind of thing, I mean it, the, the, the Equality Act had just about being passed. And so that kind of first thing had been won, and then suddenly there were all these people, particularly been in Scotland - um, so I'm an academic, but I come from a working class background. And I, my kind of working class-ness struck me when I landed in Edinburgh pathology department, as a PhD student, and everybody else had gone to Oxbridge, and I hadn't a clue what was going on, and all that, and I was wearing stripy jumpers, and dungarees, short hair, and I just - but it wouldn't have mattered what I dressed, I just would stick out because I was a woman. Um, and just because I didn't have the right accent, and didn't, so, so and the women's movement was pretty middle class, because women have more freedoms, and I just every now and again would meet people and we kind of go, yeah - background, this kind of this class, you know. And it took, it's just, it's just, you know, it's not that you didn't support the women's movement it was just that they were kind of priorities and, and ways of seeing things that were just different.

And was that in in Edinburgh, before you went, went down to Greenham?

Well, I think that's where I first started thinking about it, but also after that, I mean, it wasn't top in my mind in, when I first started going down to Greenham. The first, but one thing that I noticed was I mean, Greenham was hugely well organised in the, in a, in a very - and I, my kind of political background before that had really been in anarchism. So I was very much on board with, with that kind of way of organising - in small groups, and open to suggestion, and everyone, and kind of a network of small groups. And Greenham did that really, really well.

You mean because of the way the gates were organised?

No, no, I just mean so the so the, the basic organisation of um, Greenham common was - I don't know if people caught us - I'm sure some people knew it was an anarchist setup. Which the women's movement was really I mean, it came from that, and from the idea of um, women's affinity groups, you know, sort of women's groups just talking about yourself and, and, and kind of gaining confidence from that, and then understanding a sense of self really. And a lot of us had gone through that thing. I mean, I'd gone through a whole period of working, of being in anarchist groups, which were mostly male dominated and, and despite being so opinionated, I wasn't particularly confident. Um, and it's just quite - and discovering that actually working with women, certainly at that time, was just so much easier. And I think from that point, I, I just I always chose to work in women's groups.

Why?

Because, because you could get more done. It's not that there wasn't conflict, I mean, there wasn't much conflict - to start with anyway, because people were just so - it was just so great to have great groups of women who kind of knew where you were coming from. And were sort of very mindful of everyone needing to have their space. Whereas a lot of political - I mean, and I think this is true now - there's a lot of macho posturing in life, sometimes! And that's just quiet - it's not efficient, and it's frustrating and it's - so, so it's such a relief to just work with women actually. But one of - because we were just women at Greenham, people hated us. They couldn't handle it.

What people, what particular people?

Well, there was some very overt hate. I mean, we used to get people would drive by and hurl abuse at the camp - women sitting in the camp. There would be, I think some people were probably attacked - certainly verbally abused. All the pubs, I mean, the one of the first meetings I went to was in a pub. But I think eventually all of the pubs had signs 'Saying, no lesbians, no Greenham women, no this, no that', really sort of quite aggressively anti.

And why do you think that was?

I think because we were a threat to the status quo, and that sounds quite grandiose. But I think that's the only explanation, because we got the same reaction from some of the peace movement, because there were quite a few camps then at various air bases, 'cause, because of the cold - it was the height of the Cold War. Because things have changed a lot, and things haven't changed, if you know I mean? They, in some ways I think they're worse actually. But but at the time, we'd only just got the Equality Act, so when I was at school, I was actively discriminated against for being female. I wasn't allowed to take maths A' Level. I was, er, because the - or physics, and eventually I did get to take physics, but was not allowed to be in the class which - in the normal physics A' Level class, because the teacher who taught the A' Level maths and physics refused to teach girls A' Level physics. And he was allowed to get away with it. Um, and eventually I ended up leaving that school and doing doing the subjects at Tech, but that's a different story. Um, but, so the, the way that, the way that discrimination against women went, and the attitude towards women was very much more overtly misogynistic. And that was, and it wasn't just, it wasn't just men who thought that way, it was kind of most of the population. And so in some ways that's changed. I mean, it's certainly not as overt, I mean I spent most of my career being the lap bore, because I'd pull people up on sexist jokes. I remember going to research talks where some guy who was an obstetrician or something, because I was biomedical science would would spend most of his lecture telling boob jokes. And it's just, you know, stuff like that - really blatant stuff. So it's that kind of atmosphere. But I think more importantly, was that we were effective. We got a lot of attention. Um, and I think it was almost like, you know, we didn't need them. And I met someone years later who, who was still angry that men weren't allowed to take part. This is a woman who was in the SWP for 20 years, and then left, but she was still - thought it was wrong that men weren't allowed to take part in the Greenham common demonstrations. Because we were exclusive, but, you know, there were like how many - 170/180 air bases in the country, there were several

other peace camps. There was one women's camp and then we set up a women's camp in Rosyth as well. Um, so that, you know, it was that kind of, oh, you can't have - it's exclusionary or, you know, that kind of thing. But, and also the lesbian thing, you know 'Oh, you must be all lesbians.' And 'How can you do these things without men?' I don't know. I never quite understood it.

And do you think the woman only decision was was a double edged sword? Or do you think it was a success factor?

Oh, it's definitely a success factor. Um, I think it was absolutely essential for it to work. I think it - because of that decision, I mean, the decision was pragmatic, it was because there was, um, there was a threat of abuse. And you're quite vulnerable in a peace camp, actually.

Physical violence?

Yeah. There was an incident, um, when someone came into someone's bed - quite early on. And there was a big, big discussion about it. Um, and I think some people didn't like it but - who were originally involved. But I think it was just an absolutely spot on decision. I think it made Greenham much bigger than another peace camp. I mean the peace camps were important. I mean - I there's a peace camp in Faslane which has been going for a very long time, which is mixed. And we used to go there sometimes as well. I mean, people were anti men, but working with women is so much easier. Um, and I think it just worked. To go back to the class thing - I started talking about the the affinity groups. The first time the class thing struck me and it wasn't oh, this is about class - it was just like, there was huge emphasis on on supporting women to do physical things. And I had absolutely no problem with the you know, I didn't quite understand that. Psychologically I was where really where I need support, you know, like, but I've - but the physical thing just came naturally to me, and I think that is a class thing, it's a, it's a, because I think if you grow up in a working - you're much less protected physically, and you know, there's, there's just a lot more going on that you have to defend yourself against. And, and so that, that was

kind of when I started to reflect on it - was when I realised, and when people started to go 'Hey, where are the black women?' and there were black women, and they sort of, so the Main Gate became a lot of black women, the Green Gate became kind of all goddess-y. And um the Blue Gate was very much northern working class, and it, and it was kind of interesting how, because people living so closely together, it didn't, it wasn't fragmentation, it was diversification, really. And I think the strength - and that was the strength of having small groups um, who kind of networked with each other as a structure, rather than having someone going 'Today we're going to do this, and this is how it will work. And you'll do that.' And it just wouldn't have survived, I don't think.

So, do you think that that um, helped with conflicts within a collective?

Yeah. I'm not saying there weren't conflicts, there were. Um, but there was a lot of support, and love, and care of people. I think that helped hugely. I think the fact that - I think, I don't think Greenham would have been as creative if it had been a mixed, um, and top down structure - I don't think it would have lasted as long, I don't think it would have had the ramifications that it had. Because Greenham women got involved in the Women in Prison movement in, as you say, sort of - I mean, I was already involved in Rape Crisis, but those kinds of subjects in, in all kinds of different areas. That just kind of touched on that. Um, and I think, I think it was responsible for a whole generation of, of women who changed the way women behaved, I think.

And was it, do you think more um, about the women's movement than it was about the peace movement, for you?

No, it was both. It was both. Um. No, I mean, I, I think most people were worried about the Cold War in the early '80s. And I think, I can't remember how I got into it, but I think I must have actively sought out people. I'd been on CND marches - there were a lot of CND marches then, and I kind of wanted to do more than that. Um. The first time I went to Greenham common, I took a chain and padlock with me just in case I chained myself.... But so, and the friend that I went with, who's

actually the friend I met yesterday, knew she was never going to do anything like that. But she used to come. So there were always people who, who were going to do the actions, and people who were going to observe, and that was part of it's strength. And you know, how the affinity groups worked - you have an observer, and you have a legal adviser, and those people stay away - didn't guarantee you wouldn't get arrested, but you're less likely to get arrested, and, and they would record, record - the observer would record what was going on, often by taking pictures, but also just by writing things down. And the legal observer would make sure the legal help was sorted out, and a solicitor was contacted, and know the names of everyone - I've still got lists of people. Um. And then there was the way in which the um, people communicated. So the phone trees and that kind of things. Um. And it was just, it was just, it wasn't just about the big demos, you know, the Embrace the Base and the blockades, and all the other things. It was about constantly niggling at them, supporting women in prison - a lot of women went to prison. There were - people who were there regularly often had strings of court cases, and supporting people at the court. And the courts were always packed and they were quite entertaining sometimes because you know, they're just, there was a lot of people there, and people were quite funny sometimes - nobody didn't really have lawyers, unless someone was telling you something quite serious.

People defended themselves?

People defended themselves generally, and most people, a lot of, a lot of the women, sometimes women decided they were not going to go to prison, but effectively if you got on a charge, you knew you were going to go to prison, because you weren't going to pay the fine. Um.

Did you go to prison?

Um hum.

Why did you go?

I went to Coulton Wood, which is in Suffolk. Suffolk or Sussex? It was where Myra Hindley was, which is quite bizarre. Um, I went a couple of times there. And I got - I mean it was very unpredictable. I mean, one of the times I got, I went to Coulton Wood was I'd been arrested - we'd been doing an action that we didn't think we get arrested for, which was kind of dancing in front of the cruise, you know where they bring the cruise missiles in through Blue Gate. Do you know all this?

Well I've seen, I've seen videos, and I've been done.

Yeah. So the cruise missiles were coming through Blue Gate, which is why Blue Gate was sort of - has got such an odd reputation with people. I hadn't realised it was seen as party gate, but it was a gate where a lot of things happened all the time, it was quite full on. And because they've got cruise missiles through, and if you happened to be there, and they're bringing cruise missiles in, you just have to go and lie in front of the gate. And we decided, I mean you didn't have to, but if you felt like you wanted to. But, and the, this particular occasion, the, we decided we didn't - everybody had some kind of charge pending, at least one charge pending, and we didn't really want to get arrested. So we thought oh, well we'll just dance in front of the thing they won't arrest us for dancing. And they did. They arrested all of us.

And went and charged you?

And charged us, and we all went to Coulton Wood together. And were put on 22 - I was put in solitary confinement, actually. We were on 23 hours lockdown. So that when we saw each other, we made lots of fuss.

And is that, is that why they put you in solitary confinement? Just to try...

No, they just put me on solitary confinement because I only gave them the minimum information. They got annoyed!

So I'm interested in things like you know, when you said you niggled them constantly, what, what sort of things? What kind of forms did that take?

Sometimes we had picnics in the base. I mean, we got more and more adventurous - as they got more aggressive. When we first went there, there wasn't even a fence all the way around. By the time we got to - by the time cruise came and the sort of the mid like '80s, you heard, not just fences with barbed wire, you know, the bits that come up with um, rolls and rolls of razor wire, which some women worked out how to crawl through and um, you know, a lot more security.

And how did women work out how to crawl through razor wire? Just trial and error, or scientific I mean how did that...?

Basically protect yourself and you just kind of - I mean it's the same way as going over the fences. So the way, the way you go over the fences you, I mean they used - usually we used ladders and through coats over the barbed wire, and just climbed over that way. Or you could just climb up the fence and put a blanket or something over the wire. And with the razor wire, you just sort of wrap, wrap yourself up and sort of work, make your way through. I mean it's, it's amazing what you can do.

I juts find it - I find it quite - I can only imagine how humiliating it must have been for the Minister of Defense to have women - for whom they had so little respect - making fools of them on a daily, you know, by daily basis.

Yeah. I mean, I think it was it was the creativity and the ridiculousness of some of the things we did that were the, actually the most befuddling, particularly to the police. I mean, I remember once, I can't remember what action it was, but it, but there were quite a few people there. But we'd we put knitting wool webs across all the gates, and kind of um, got strands of wool, king of going various places. And we were just sort of sitting in amongst them, around the gates, and the police were trying to drag people out, and they were getting tangled up in the wool. I mean it

was only knitting wool, so it wasn't - but they just couldn't handle it. And the police, a lot of the time the police couldn't really work out how to deal with it.

And did that make them angry, or frustrated or..?

I think it did some - I think some of them got angry and frustrated. There were certain police forces who were quite brutal, especially during things like the blockade where we took the fences down. I remember, I and loads of other people got our hands, sort of battered from them hitting us. They were quite vicious, and they took their numbers off, so you couldn't report them. And the people, if you got picked up inside the base, they were quite brutal as well.

In what respect?

They were quite rough. Sort of threw you around, or put you in a half Nelson. And that was, that was scary because you were outside European, UK jurisdiction inside the base. And some people - I never got taken right inside the cells in the base, but some people did. And that was, that was sort of um - the thing is, though, that you always had the strength knowing that people knew where you were. People knew what you were doing, and they would come and get you - they would make sure you'd gone. So I mean most - in the base, they were quite reluctant to arrest people in the base.

Why do you think that was?

I don't think they wanted people to know that we could get into the base so easily. Um. Because we did things like have picnics, so what were they doing in the base having a picnic? Right! And we would sort of dress up in silly clothes, things like that. So yeah, we did provoke them a lot. Um. So they would mostly just um, pick us up. Rough handle us a bit. Keep us hanging around in the base for a while and then chuck us out at the opposite end of where they'd found this. But since people knew we were in, and knew that's what they did, there would be people

going around trying to find us. So it was, it was kind of spontaneous, but quite well set up in terms of how...

It sounds very humorous. And also it sounds creative and intelligent and humorous, that Margaret Atwood, you know kind of...women will laugh at them. And to me, obviously I know that it's cold and wet, and you know uncomfortable.

Very, very cold some winters.

How long were you there for?

I was there off between 1981 and 198... (inaudible).

Wow.

But I was not living there all of that time. I lived there large chunks of '83 and '84.

You talked about being in the same prison as Myra Hindley, and other women have talked about that to me, and said that she was quite supportive of Greenham, and said that if she was released, she would like to go to Greenham.

I don't remember that. What I do remember is that she spent most of her - she was quite benign looking, except that because you knew who she was, you weren't sure. But she, she used to sit in the warden's office knitting. Um. But it was quite interesting to know what she looked like. I don't really like the idea of her being a sort of object of wonder, if you see what I mean, she's just a woman really, but she did some fairly horrible things. No, and I don't really know about Myra Hindley, at all. I think about Myra Hindley.

So how did you, when you did your, you said you were doing your thesis in '83 and '84?

I was writing it.

Did you write it away from the camp?

No, no, I wrote most of it - a lot of it at the camp.

And how did you cope with the evictions?

I made sure I always knew where my stuff was. (Laughs). I mean, there was certain stuff you could grab and just get out the way. I mean, it's I don't think I ever lost anything.

That's astonishing.

It's, well, you know, there's sort of a lot of - yeah. I was looking at some of the stuff I've got now, do you want to see any of the stuff I've got? I'll just stick it on pause. I wrote everything by hand, or, and I used to write tons of letters. And I did with my thesis, I wrote it by hand. Then I typed it. Then I started using the line editor, frame editor, at university and it just it's a very weird process. I was the contact for organising the buses to Greenham for the Embrace the Base, which as you know, was hugely popular. And um, the - it started with a minibus and turned into about five coaches. And so our phone was just constantly...

From Edinburgh?

Edinburgh yeah. I think a few from Glasgow came, because we knew women in Glasgow, but I think also they had their own buses. I used to take a lot of pictures, so that's, that's our Edinburgh group on the blockade. We'd just driven 13 hours in a minibus, which is why most people are asleep. And that's - you can't see it - but that's the Rosyth peace camp banner.

Let me know if you don't want me to take any pictures of anything. Because I think they're great - it's a shame, we've got a photographer project, but we'll have to make do with my...

And I can tell you something about the Voz, was in the you know the silo demo?

Yeah.

She was part of that, and so was Jenny, who's probably in there somewhere - I can't see her, but I'm sure she was there. I don't think Lorna was in it. But I...(inaudible)

Somebody else said that she was supposed to go down to Embrace the Base from - god where did she live then? I can't remember where she said she lived. And she went out the night before on New Year's Eve, got so drunk she missed the coach. So yeah, you weren't alone.

But um, but the - what else? Oh, I made, I just made the decision. I think I was probably a bit tired. But then, because they, when they went, they were all sent to er, god what's it called? Holloway. And it was January. It was absolutely freezing it was minus 10. And me and Jenny's sister, and a couple of other people set up a peace camp outside the er, prison for the duration of the time they were in there. And it must been after Embrace the Base or around - was it that year? It was a time when Greenham just became really really big news. So I guess it was '83, and, um, and so the GLC sent us a brazier, and some cardboard to sleep on, and brought us a curry, and we got press from everywhere. So there must be like so many photographs of me and four other people who were there. And we were on all the news channels. I don't know where all this footage has gone to, at all. I really don't know where it's gone to. But, um, so lots of things like that happened that just, and I think everybody probably took part in different things like that.

(Edit in recording)

So this is the blockade is is less well known, but it was actually, it was it was much more um, there weren't so many people there. But there were a lot of people, and it was, it was kind of this, this blockading the

road - this is actually Green Gate. And we laid down, we trusted Gandhi and laid down in front of the horses when they charged us.

Wow. And it worked. Did the horses not like it? Because I can't imagine horses being keen to step on people?

Well that's what we said - Gandhi said that, if you lie down in front of a horse it won't trample you. So we did it, and it worked. See the police, I mean some of them I remember on the blockade, I remember a guy showing me a CND badge underneath his lapel. One of police guys. We were sort of face to face all day. So they were sort of standing like that. And we were just sort of sitting or lying in the middle of the road, and they were just, so they had, so they had these kind of on foot and they were I think more local bobbies, they had the cavalry, and then they had people drafted in like the Met - who when we took the fence, because it was a 3 day blockade, and I think on the second or third day we took the fences down, and I've still got a bit of fence. It just looks like fence, but I'll show you. And I'm afraid I screwed it up a couple years ago to fit it in the drawer. It used to be in a beautiful (inaudible), but I'm afraid now it's just a piece of fence. It is, and there's the fence that I cut down.

(Edit in recording).

...and it's such a, such a great female non-violent, but quite...

I think that's where the fluffy thing - I don't think Greenham common was at all fluffy. It was very, very - it's now described as fluffy.

Really?

And I think because people put, people remember putting symbolic things on the fence during Embrace the Base, and I just - I don't like that - oh there's more Greenham pictures. That's '82, that was - this might be Embrace the Base. We were a pretty sorry looking lot!

Yeah, but I think...

I can't remember why...broken hearted...

You may well have been....

And this is the poor marching band who were great.

That stopped them, you know, stopped cruise missiles, that must have been, you know...

The first time I encountered them, I was chained to a fence and they sort of came, and there were people chained to the fence all the way around the base. And I think this was that was '81, and they just came around and entertained everybody in rotation!

(Edit in recording).

But during during the miners' strike, we, we used to run women's discos in Edinburgh to raise funds for, mainly for transport actually, to get women down to Greenham. And just to support some of the women who went down, who, who kind of either for fines occasionally, we rarely paid fines actually, but stuff like that - and just helping people out a bit. And, and so we ran these women's discos regularly for several years, and during the miners' strike we got - I can't remember how it happened, but we got in contact with the miners' women, and we started having joint miner's, Greenham women's discos. Um. And by then we had a peace bus in Edinburgh or Fife, mostly because it was based in the site, and we used to take it all around Fife and Scotland, but up as far as Aberdeen and places like that. But during the miners' strike we used it to take people to pickets, and for general miner's strike purposes, and got very, very close with the, with the sort of women, the sort of Fife, Edinburgh, East Lothian, sort of miners' women groups. I was quite, nobody, nobody ever talks about that sort of thing - relationship. And to the extent that, that me and a couple of other people, women, were invited to talk at the Dalgleith working men's club

about Greenham common. Although I said everybody hated us, there were actually, people with whom - there were sort of solidarity in strange places and kind of relationships in, I mean, they could see that we were genuine and we, and I grew up around men like that - I come from West Yorkshire, so, so I, I lived in a village that was part pit and part mill and part rural you know, farming. So and they're all on halves because they're on no strike pay. And er, I don't - I can't remember, I'm sure we would have tried to buy them drinks but I'm not sure they - I know one of them bought me a drink - felt guilty about it. But it was just great. I mean they were just sort of you know, like working class men are, and my dad was the same - I remember turning up at my parents house, with two other women in tow. Very Greenham-y women and my dad didn't bat an eyelid and he was concerned they were hitching down to London. So he gave him a lift up to the nearest station, you know the nearest um, service station. (Laughs). So I think, it was mixed, you know? I mean, where you find a point of contact with people, they weren't sort of anti Greenham, but the local Newbury just really - I mean, there were people, some people in Newbury offered best, but there were many who were supportive in other ways.

And why do you think that was? What was there - was it the look of you?

I think they didn't get, and Newbury's a very comfortable, sort of place. And they didn't get us, and they didn't understand the point. And they, they thought that in the middle of a Cold War, we should be bristling with nuclear weapons, and they couldn't quite see the point - the argument that actually made us less safe, or any of those things, you know, actually taking this on, is men's work, and putting themselves in danger, the fact that women put themselves in danger just by being women every day of their lives is, yeah. So yeah.

So if there was, um, you know, given that we're going to try and create a legacy, for Greenham common, we're going to try and get some funding to make some modules for secondary schools and things so that, you know, they can...

I'd be really interested in that.

...learn about Greenham and the Suffragettes, rather than just people who are, you know, from 150 years ago or whatever. What would you say are the things that you would like Greenham to be remembered for?

I'd like it to be remembered for the way it organised, which was hugely successful, and highly - it's the only, it's the most successful most long run - I mean, from my perspective, it's it's a, an anarchic, or anarchical feminist organisation, which just really worked really, really worked. And I think that a lot of people are afraid of the word anarchy, but because anarchy isn't chaos, it's actually very well organised, but it's about allowing people to generate, it comes from, from the person and the small group outwards rather than the other direction. So you use everybody's potential, and everybody's ideas and it really demonstrated that that works. Not, you know, I mean, it's and it showed, it showed what power women can have when they actually get together, and trust each other, and do things. And I think in itself that is one of the most important women that um, I think one of the most important things that - certainly for me, Greenham gave me a confidence, and I know I said that I wasn't scared of the physical stuff, but it's given me a physical confidence, or a way of handling myself, I think, which um, I don't think I would have had. And the women's movement gave me sort of psychological confidence, really.

And how has impacted on your life going forward, do you think?

I think, I think it's made me more - I'm not saying that I'm (inaudible), but I think it makes me less afraid to say things if they're wrong, or do things that - during the Iraq war, you know that when they started bombing, and there was sort of this march into town organised by the university, and lots of people congregated in town and then everybody just stood around, and I grabbed hold of a couple of my friends who are much younger, but kind of on board, and said 'Let's sit down,' and some people were horrified, but enough people sat down for there to be a blockade in

the middle, of the what, and then the police just started, eventually they - some of my colleagues were there, actually - interesting! Not sure. And one of them said to me after 'I, I don't think I'd have the courage to do that.'

Isn't it funny something as simple as sitting down is both horrifying for people, and takes so much courage.

But I think it's, that's why it's effective. People don't - and sitting down is non - because it's non threatening doesn't mean people won't be violent, but it's much harder for them to be violent than aggressive. I mean, they did eventually, they picked us up and threw us, or certainly they threw me, because I remember a group of Asian lads get really indignant that they'd thrown a woman on the pavement or something. I mean, they didn't hurt me. You know.

And do you think that that sort of protection that men feel - that protecting the men feel they have to do, or that they ought to do on behalf of women, was another reason why it was good that Greenham went women only?

I've never particularly looked for the protection of men, or expected it. And, but I think, I think it's more about having confidence in your own power and knowing who you are, and a lot of women don't know who they are. So it's just like something that's missing in the curriculum. It's, it's missing.

Yeah.

And I think, I think just being - I think giving people permission, or giving women permission to do that is huge. And I still think although things have changed a lot, um, they haven't changed anywhere near as much as we think they have. And I think there's a danger of them sort of going backwards, really?

So when you say that, that women don't know who they are, what, what do you mean by that?

I think women, a lot of women, and this is a thing, I mean, I'm not talking just about working class women, but I think it's particularly relevant to working class women are defined by the people around them. They're defined by the kids, they're defined by their partners. They're defined by the work that they do, and their work colleagues, their male work colleagues, their boss. They don't really have - I mean, this is a blanket statement that's not true for everybody, but they, they find it harder to say 'This is what I want, and this is this is what I do. This is my hobby, or this is my interest', or I think - and it starts at school. You know, the lads are hugely entitled.

(Edit in recording).

In terms of creativity, and the sort of artistic elements around Greenham, was there, is there an image or, because there's the iconic image isn't there, of the women on the silos.

Which is hard to beat.

And the Embrace the Base, a lot of pictures. Is there anything for you that you would say?

The blockade was a more - it was a bigger demonstration in many ways. I mean, there weren't as many people there, but it was, it was huge and it had a very huge remit. We decided we were going to take the whole fence down and invade the base. We didn't take the whole fence down, but we took a lot of it down. It was much more - not conflictual, but there was much more antagonism, they drafted in a lot of heavy duty police and the - they really didn't like the fence being taken down. It was it was a big, big, really big deal, I think. And the blockade - the blockade was just before they started evictions, or the next phase of evocations, the sort of really nasty phase of evictions.

And do you think that was your punishment for taking the fence down?

I don't, I don't think it was punishment. I think they would have done it anyway because it was, it was around the time the cruise was being established. And I think, I think they would have escalated anyway. And I think that's why we escalated, and if one person escalates, someone else escalates, and, you know, but I think - iconic images. I think, actually just the sort of day to day of being there when it's quiet and there aren't big demonstrations, and it's not really quiet but you know, there's a handful of people and you know most of them, and your clothes stink of smoke, and it's often cold and wet, but also in the summer it was kind of quite nice. We used to turn up from Edinburgh, in boots and thick jumpers, and everyone else was moving vests and shorts! So it was, so I think it's more the kind of cooking and telling stories, and sort of mucking I mean, there was always stuff - there were quiet times - I mean, it was quite full on, that's why people got tired at the base because there was always something going on. And often instigated by people - let's do something today, small groups of people. But sometimes it was an eviction or whatever. So I think those - I don't know if I've got any images of those. They're more in my head those images.

No, but that's a feeling then, isn't it?

It is. Yeah. And I think it's, but it's also the feeling of community and having someone having your back. I was - um, so whatever was happening, there would be people who knew what was going on. You did have that protection. In the prison, most of the time I was in prison I had, there were other people there - so even on a 23 hour lockdown, you know, sort of make noise.

So did you ever feel physically unsafe either in prison or when you were in the camp?

Physically unsafe? I don't think so.

No?

Maybe inside the base, where you're very isolated and they're in control completely. But I think the physical thing I've dealt with that all of my life - those kinds of physical things that I've, I wasn't the same - I think it was more, so the first time I went to prison, it's, it's a strange feeling because you're completely under the control of the people there, and that's quite a scary feeling, It's very, very isolating. And I remember thinking about how, how far you know, if you look out of the window and you can see kind of a bit of a wall, you see barbed wire, and you know, there's another wall, and then there's another wall, and it's it's a long way. You're sort of very much away from that. Um. But, I mean, the other thing is the, the other important things that I think Greenham did was kind of create a nucleus around which other things happened. So, the Women in Prison movement, which I mentioned before, was started by Greenham women just being in prison and talking to people. I mean, pretty shocking, I mean Coulton Wood had, half the people there were on deportation, about three quarters of the women there were on some kind of mental health medication. So before breakfast, there would be this great long queue of people waiting for their medicine. And some of them would be in distress. And it's noisy - prison. You know, people scream and bang and get upset. And they - we were on lockdown, I think probably because they were short staffed, but mainly because they were having mini riots, I mean more disturbances, people - I remember one breakfast that I was at where someone upturned the table and people started getting up and waving their arms at each other, and officers just rushed in shut everything down, and kicked everybody out, and sent everybody back. So those kind of things were just kind of normal. So I think...I think experiencing that, and knowing how disadvantaged most of the people in prison are, which I kind of knew, but it's a different thing to see it happen, is, I mean, Myra Hindley was a celebrity, and I did hear people tell me that she was supportive of Greenham, but I never really knew what that quite meant. But yeah, I don't know.

So, you think that the women's movement to other areas of the women's movement we created?

Yeah, so, I mentioned class, but also women of colour, I mean, all those things were starting to happen around them anyway. But I think Greenham played a big part in, in kind of, like a kind of crucible where those things had expression, or some kind of expression for some women - who then kind of took them to other places. And there was, there was quite a lot of dead time where you sit around and talk to people about things, and lots of things, you know, lots and lots of interesting conversations about things. And sort of, but yeah, it was very creative.

Women have talked about how they were able for the first time to talk about, you know, sexual abuse, for instance, that had happened to them before they came to the camp, or a domestic situation that they'd been able to get away from, and then they'd subsequently discovered whilst at the camp, talking to other women, that they could get benefits, and therefore they didn't have to go back into the domestically violent place.

Yes, I mean, I remember, I do know, the, with the Rape Crisis, because I kind of discovered that in Edinburgh before I went to Greenham. Um. And that's how I got to Greenham really, not just through the peace movement, but also through the women's movement. Um. And kind of talking about those things, there was things - there was sort of rape and domestic abuse that I didn't feel ready to talk to people about. And I felt, I don't know whether that's because I felt I was coming from a different place about it or not, but it was much later when I talked to people about those things.

And did people talk to you about their experiences?

They did. And I do remember someone who phoned our phone line actually, who lived in - she must have been a student or something, but she lived - she, I met her in Newbury because she was there. And, I mean, that was a stranger rape thing. Which is quite unusual. I mean,

you've worked in Rape Crisis, you know. But um, yeah. But I don't particularly remember, I mean, the group - certainly the women's, we had a women's meeting place in Edinburgh, which is where Rape Crisis met, and we quite often had women, well not often, but women would walk in off the street, and would have a story to talk about. The, so I did have those kinds of conversations with people.

So you mentioned in your conversation with Becca, Forgotten Gate.

Yes. That was the first gate. It was, I think '81, and they weren't even - there was an action, it's the one where I chained myself to the gate. And I do have a picture of that somewhere. I can't remember where it is it must be on Facebook.

That must have been right at the beginning?

It was right at the beginning. Yeah. And, and we had this huge meeting in a tent about it, and about what the ideas were, and what people could do and, and sort of to try and - it was before affinity groups really concretised, but it was just like make sure there is sort of at least two people who know where you are and who you are. And um, and it was chain yourself to the gate for 24 hours, which being me, I just did. I thought, well, why not? But anyway, this friend had moved back to London, which is where she was from. And she'd heard about Greenham and contacted me and asked me if I wanted to go, so that's how I got into Greenham. And so I turned up with the padlock and chain. And she just stood and talked to me while I chained myself to the gate, but it was interesting. It was good. And that's kind of just how I got into it. It never, never went away after.

So, because it was September when the first woman turned up and chained themselves to the gate. So was it part of that?

It wasn't the very first - I wasn't in the march, but it was very soon after that. It was kind of, must have been, would have been about October. Yeah. October November, I think. I do have pictures of it, but... It was -

I wasn't actually there when this incident happened, but basically, but I knew the woman, who'd helped her and she'd written the article about. And it was at Blue Gate, and they, what they said had happened was, she'd driven a car into the ditch, and they'd pulled it out, and her car wasn't usable. So they'd found her a place in a bender to sleep for the night. And then she wrote this article about being scared for her life because there was a lesbian in the next tent, and this that - and it was just really nasty, and stupid. And it was just like, and sort of misquoting people, or putting them out of context. But you know, that's just what it was like, and of course all the technicians in my lab had this article. So we went through it - I told them what rubbish it was.

So when you talk about affinity groups, are those, are those the groups within the camp, the small groups that you were talking about where women sort of...

Affinity groups, were kind of action groups, so, so we had a, we kind of had affinity group, which evolved from like the women from Greenham that I went with, that I was with a lot. Sorry not - and the women from Edinburgh, but they basically depended on who was there. And you'd sort it out at the time, what your role was, and whether you were going to do NVDA or not. And then the other two, then the legal observer and the thing, so that was more - that was how the actions were organised, people worked in small groups, and so, um, and so those could change. I mean, there were people that I quite often was in affinity group with because I, I knew them well, and that they could really change and it didn't matter, because people knew how it worked. And were just, and I think that was the strength of it - it wasn't reliant on just a few people, or a particular leader, or any of those things.

How did those processes come about then? Because that that is, you know, it's very simple, it's very effective. And you think, well that must have...

It's essentially, it's, anarchism. It's, it's...

So somebody would have brought would have brought that with them, in effect?

Well, I think there was, there was a lot of, I mean, the way that women organised in the '70s and '80s was very much like that - it was small groups. And small groups where everyone was equal, there weren't leaders - and collectives, that whole, so it grew out of that whole '70s collective thing I think. Which was particularly strong in the women's movement. Also it's just really effective. And it made it much, much harder for the police, because they couldn't arrest one person as the leader. I mean, they kept trying, but they couldn't really pick people out and go, we'll take - we'll arrest these people who are the ringleaders and... Yeah. Because they tried to do that. I mean, I remember doing an action during the Falklands War, we, it wasn't even supposed to be an action - we just sat in front of the recruitment office, like six of us, so I, I was, I was picked out as the ringleader for some reason. I don't know why, but it was, it was three of us. It was two other PhD students and various other people that we knew. And we just went and sat outside and handed out leaflets about how dangerous it was to start a war in the Falkland Islands. And it just happened to be the day the Belgrano sank. So they arrested us - they, I ended up with bruises everywhere. And they put us in prison, in jail, for most of the - you know the prison cells for several hours. And then we had a big trial.

(Edit in recording)

You never knew, that what you were doing was going to be arrested or not, because it wasn't really about what you were doing, it was about what the policy was at the time, or how they felt. I guess whether they had a budget!

Well, I guess what their um, what they thought might look good in the media, or not?

(Edit in recording)

Oh, the reason name it was called the Forgotten Gate. No. So all the gates have been given a name - the name of the rainbow, you know, they were called Yellow - all the rest of it. Um. And, and this gate, they forgot about. It later became Violet or something like that.

Oh right, okay, I've heard of Violet Gate.

Um. But at the time, it was called the Forgotten Gate. So someone came around and said 'We need some people at Forgotten Gate.' And I said 'I can do that.' Well, it was variable. I mean, the mainstream media. I mean, you wouldn't expect The Sun to be on board really, would you? (Laughs).

No, particularly not at that time.

No. And I think, I mean that, that's, that's an article I remember just because it was kind of shown to me at work by the technicians, and also because I knew the story that it involved. The - I stopped, I did use to read, I mean, I remember reading court reports of, of places that I'd been to, you know, places when I'd been there, and just sort of thinking well, the press never actually tell the truth. So that was something else I got from Greenham. Is to know how, I guess I learned some media savviness, but I also learned that the press will write what they want to write, and if the truth's not quite what they want, they'll change it. But - for political writers anyway, that's true.

I have um, oh, the only other question I've got is do you think the camp was politically infiltrated? Do you think there were, there was sort of sabotage? Do you know from the inside?

I don't know. I mean, there may have been, but I think it would have been quite difficult to be effective. If they wanted information, then maybe, but I don't know what they would have done with that. I didn't notice any sudden improvement in the techniques for dealing with us. Um. There were also a lot of, a lot of people thought that they were, they were sort of sending sort of sonic beams and things, which may

well have been true. And some, particular women in Green Gate felt unwell, I don't know. But I, I don't know if there's any evidence for that at all, but I'm sure they would do whatever they had resources to do, and kind of you would expect that they might do that. But it was, it was quite a gruelling, I mean, to actually be in the camp, I think, I mean, I know that's, that's what happens, but I've never heard of anyone being able to name anyone or think that at all. I think to start with they didn't take us seriously enough, I'm sure. Eventually they would, but they would have - I think it would have been difficult for them because they would have had to find a woman who's able to, to sort of, I mean, not that it was exclusive or anything, but that who would be - participate in it because there was a kind of, you know people, cooperated on, on the whole. Well, generally, I mean, there were people who came, I don't know - I mean, there was a kind of division between people who did direct action, and people who didn't, but not at Greenham, because it was a direct action camp. But I think, I think they would have stuck out like a sore thumb really, but they would have been welcomed. But I think what they would have gone out of it, I really don't know, because there weren't big secrets. I think Greenham women were pretty determined, and it evolved, you know, with - we evolved much faster, we were much more creative, and much more evolving than they were. And, and it struck, struck a chord somewhere, because it was so popular. I mean, the fact that it was, it wasn't just because it was within striking distance of London. I mean, that helped set it up, I think. But, you know, I mean, there were women from all over the place who used to come regularly or who moved and lived there, yeah.