

## Elizabeth Greenland

The one question that I've got that I have got to ask - but it's quite an interesting question is, could you explain why you think it's important Greenham is remembered by subsequent generations?

I think, um, off the top of my head one of the things is because we succeeded. The other thing is because it was totally women based and done, and that it was peaceful. And all those three things, er, were very important - to show people that you can succeed. And because um, the whole thing was um, created because people communicated with friends by word of mouth - it was before the internet, it was long before mobile phones, and we managed to get people from all over the country to be involved and share their time and their efforts and their thoughts, and all come because they cared about the same cause. And I think that is quite important to remember.

Do you think it could happen now?

Um, I think it would happen in a different way. I think because women found themselves caring about something - because they were given the opportunity because we heard about it from friends, neighbours, and us we got together in little groups and decided we'd take our cars to Greenham and see what was happening, and so we did that because we were interested that women were standing up against something. We'd all heard of CND, we were all part of CND, but all we did was go on marches or demonstrations against nuclear weapons. All that we shared, really, was that we wanted a better future for our children. We didn't want war and we didn't want nuclear weapons. So, um, that's really what started it. But I think also, certainly at the time that I grew up it was very much the situation that women didn't really have close relationships - where they were talking to each other. It was before women, um, had - before a lot of women had high positions in business or anything else, there was - I grew up in a family where my mother - even though she was midwife - she stayed at home after she'd had children, and that was quite a common thing, and obviously we were the first generation after the war - we were going to get out and have our careers and do everything see. But we didn't necessarily have that close relationship with other women. I went to a girls' school where it was very competitive - not close. There was, women were sort of not - I don't know, it was almost like everyone was competent for the right man, or competing to get into university - things were very different then. And I think although at the time when I first went to Greenham I was living in Nailsworth, and Nailsworth is a very forward in alternative things, which is why I ended up settling there, because it was a really interesting place to live. And I think when I first went to Greenham there was such a

lovely atmosphere of caring and sharing, and it enabled lots of women to forge really close, deep relationships with other women - which they hadn't done before. And I think that strength - that huge strength we all found from each other - awakened...it's making me cry..

That's okay.

...it really awakened a huge strength in everyone.

Do you think society was scared of women having relationships with each other, or do you think it just wasn't valued at the time?

I think when they saw the strength of our commitment to what we were doing, and what we could achieve - um, certain sort of people found it fantastically powerful, and a certain sort of make society found it quite threatening, and didn't like it at all. And certainly, um, although it wasn't political of-course...it was! In that..but um, I think that the - some of the interesting things that came out of it was the realisation that such a big group of women - hugely diverse - age wise or society wise, or anything - they could come together, and they could waken things in themselves that they hadn't felt before. And that the strength of that, which meant that people from all over the country just appeared.. not really knowing why! And certainly some of the songs that we sang, um, we - they were very powerful. I remember one night we decided - there as a sign saying 'No entry, this is the Royal Airforce property' and everything, and we decided we wanted it down, and we couldn't obviously push it down because at the time the fences were barricaded, so there was a women that came over from um, America, somewhere - who was a descendant of the Red Indians, and she was an indigenous American, and she said 'well, we'll chant it down, and we'll sing it down', and um, we stayed up all night, and there was a huge group of people, and we sang the songs that she taught us and everything and then eventually went to sleep..and in the morning it was lying on the floor!

Wow! That's amazing!

It was amazing. And it was well, and that was - to me - that was like wow! And, um, I think being involved in all that - at the time I was a young single parent, and at the time it gave me an enormous amount of strength and confidence - just being involved in the whole Greenham thing. And I think that stayed, probably with everyone I know who was there, but I think right now we need it again, because um - you know, for people to realise they can just by the sheer camaraderie of women, and the strength of women, we can change the mess that society is in at the minute. We can get rid of all these awful women who are empowered - somehow - maybe we'll have to go and chant outside Number 10!

(Laughs). Yes!

**Maybe!**

I'm up for giving that a go!

But um, and I think at the beginning of - certainly when I was first involved in it, before it was - before we did surround the base, there was a very anti-men thing, and it was important, because we had to make sure it was completely non-violent and that it was just the power of women involved in it. And I think that alienated some people until they realised, you know I had - at the time, I had to explain to lots of men that it wasn't that we were anti-men, it was because we knew that we didn't want violence, and the only way we could ensure that didn't happen was making sure it was just women. Um. Because we used to lie down in front of police horses, and that in itself was - we wouldn't have been able to do that if men had been involved. And again the, some of the women that came over - the indigenous women that came over from America - they said 'if they charge you on police horses, lie on the floor'. Well it's all very well saying that to you, but these women said 'look, this is what will happen, they will try and intimate you - they're coming on police horses, you just have to lie on the floor - the horses will not trample a person lying on the floor, so just believe it'. And that day it was raining, and it stopped raining and the flow was very went, and we all went 'come on then' (laughs), and um because we wanted to barricade - we were barricading the entrance so they couldn't take in the stuff they needed with the cruise missiles into the site. And so we all lay on the floor, and the police were all lined up on their horses like they were going charging into..and we lay on the floor, and of-course the horses didn't, they just gently pawed at the ground.

(Laughs).

And they didn't come anywhere near us, and we lay there and they just had to turn around and go away. And things like that were incredibly empowering things to do.

Yes.

And um, although once we were sitting round - it was very, very cold - snow on the ground - and we were sitting um, I was sitting - I'd just put a kettle on to boil on a fire that we'd just built with some logs, and um, a chap came - I saw some trouble in the distance, and um there was this man - quite a tall man, and I didn't know who he was, and um men weren't allowed in the camp really, and so..he was, um...and then he, he said 'could I just?...and I sort of went over to see what it was, and realised it was the Archbishop of Canterbury!

(Laughs)!

**It was Robert Runcie.**

How did you react - did you recognise him? Or was he in his habit and mitre?!

**Well he had, because I heard the conversation that he was having, and I heard one of the women saying 'we don't care if you're the Archbishop of Canterbury - you're a man' - I don't know, don't quote me on that.**

Yeah, yeah.

**But the whole situation was because he was male he wasn't allowed, and I went 'oh, I'm making a cup of tea, come and have a cup of tea', so he came and sat down on a log, and um he said 'oh, thanks for that'. So I made him a cup of tea, and then I said to him, he went 'yes I am the Archbishop of Canterbury', I went 'oh gosh, do you take sugar in your tea?'.**

(Laughs).

**And then, because you're just sat there - nobody moves, mind you I can't actually remember - he was probably just wearing a cross around his neck - I don't expect that he was wearing all his robes. I can't actually remember what he was wearing...he would have looked a bit daft if he'd been wearing all that, wouldn't he! And er, and he was really, um, he was really interested in what we were doing. He was upset, I think he was upset because he came as a human being, rather than um, a man, but and I explained to him 'we can't have men here, because then we wouldn't be able to be peaceful because men would lose their tempers and then you know, they'd be fighting the police - we don't want that'. And he did understand that, he said um, but then I didn't know much about him - I realised afterwards because um, Conservative party and the church were always a bit hand in hand, weren't they?**

Yes.

**And he was very much not like, he was a socialist really, and so, um, so, and he really cared, and he really agreed with us about the cruise missiles, so him being there was actually quite a big statement for him. And he was very interested in what we were doing, and I know afterwards he alienated himself quite a lot from the Conservative party because of the things they were doing and whatever. And he was very much supportive of women in the church and all sorts of things, so he was quite a breath of fresh air in that he wasn't, I think he just came because - he didn't come to say 'oh,**

**god will..." nothing silly like that, it was more that he was just interested in um, how we were - I think he was interested because all these people were flocking there, and he was interested in the spirituality of it that was bringing it together, because obviously it was bigger.**

Because the Methodists I know, and the Quakers - I am aware that the Methodists, and Quakers especially, were quite heavily involved.

**The Quakers were always involved, but then they're very...**

Pacifist.

**...pacifist, and they're also very socialist, aren't they?**

Yes.

**Um, I think there were a lot of Quakers involved in the first Greenham, but I don't know.**

And where did you camp when you were there? Was it a particular gate, or did you camp at various places?

**The Green Gate. Um, we were at most of the time. It was only a small camp. I was camped with about four other tents when I first went. But there were other people from quite a long way around there.**

And was there a reason you chose that gate in particular, or was it just somewhere you ended up?

**I think um, the first - no, I think it was just where we ended up, and also we wanted to see - I wanted to be able to see er, the site and the signs and we were by...there was a, I can't remember what they called it now - a big dome on the camp, which I think it was where...**

One of the silos?

**I think it was a silo where we thought most of the stuff was there - that we were worried about, and we wanted to be able to get under the fence, over the fence, in the fence, and to climb...**

On it?

**On it. So that was the idea, that is why we were at that particular site. In-fact we did. And um, but I didn't want to get arrested because I'd got two small children, so I made the tea!**

(Laughs).

**But everyone did get arrested.**

Did you have your children with you at the camp?

**I was the only person allowed to have a male - in-fact they presumed I had two daughters - so people at the Yellow camp found out there was a man sleeping at the camp - it was only my son, he was only 7! (Laughs).**

Aww, so was there an age limit on male children?

**No, no, there were just no males allowed there. There was nothing organised like that at all. It's just that he was very conscious he probably was the only man onsite apart from the policemen - at the time we were there.**

And how did he find that?

**He thought it was funny. The policemen thought it was funny too, in-fact he used to be good friends with some of them. They used to take him off and buy him hotdogs and ice cream - well not ice cream because it was winter. He used to get on well with them, and they were all a nice bunch of chaps - they weren't in any way aggressive to us at all. And yeah, he used to...**

How long were you there for?

**I was there in bits and pieces because it was very cold, and um, so we'd just go and stay for a week or something, and then we'd go back home and wash and everything, and then we'd go back again. And sometimes I went just with my son, because it was when it was too cold - I mean camping in the snow, it was the first time - the children thought that was really good fun and it wasn't cold once we'd got all the blankets put on the floor, and the sleeping bags in, it was actually it was alright. It was a novelty for one night. But camping in the snow - I haven't don it since.**

(Laughs). And did the children - were they in schools? Were there a lot of children there?

No, there weren't many children there at all. No. I think, most of the time I was, um, most of the time I didn't - because I would just go for a weekend, and then um, we all had, we all had children, but we used to look after each other's children, so three of us would go to the camp, one of us would look after the children overnight, so what we did, because obviously when we first went we stayed there for a week, and when we did the surround the base, that when we were there for quite a times, but after that what we used to do was just leave our stuff in the tents and things, and then someone else would keep watch over them, and then we'd just go back. Um, for a couple of nights at a time. And people used to do it. Because that way you could keep your life going at home, and the children could go to school - my daughter didn't go to school, she was only 2, so um, she would come backwards and forwards with me, but we managed it really - and everyone helped each other.

Were there a lot of single parents, or, did you feel?

There were people from every....

Or were there married women as well?

Not necessarily, no because a lot of people didn't have their children with them. No, they were, mostly they were traditional people in traditional jobs and they would, um, and often there were people who um, who had children at school, and they would arrange for someone else to do their children at school and things - no it wasn't necessarily single parents at all. A lot of people there didn't have children - the younger people, they were...I think, I mean there were people there who were retired. There were people there camping overnight who were retired doctors, there were a lot of um, people of all er, pathways really. There were - I remember this vicar's wife being there, and was quite elderly, and she was like 'well, there's no good praying in churches, we've got to be out and showing what we mean to help people', so she was very much coming from a Christian element - or at-least a caring element. So it was interesting, and the um, but of course there were lots of alternative types, because it was an alternative thing to do. But I'm not going to - it was more or less a cross section of people from, yes there were single parents, yes there were gay people, but there are in every part of life, there really was a cross section of people. And the wonderful thing about it was everybody got on perfectly well - regardless of who they were or what age they were. It was a really powerful thing, and I think um, I'm really think that people should be calling on that at the moment and changing things.

So was all your experience there positive, or were there any things there that were unexpected or negative - in general people got on?

I don't think I saw anything negative, no.

And the police, you said, were fairly benign?

**Yes. Yes. I think that it, er, the whole atmosphere there was one of strength and um, no I don't remember - trying to think of something, now. No, it was just amazing because everybody - there were loads and loads of local people as well, who used to drive up to the fence and bring us food and people used to take big cartons of water and fill those up for us, and people used to bring us fire wood. So no.**

So there was quite a lot of local support that you experienced?

**There was support from all over the country, I don't know - you don't ask people who are bringing you a pile of logs if they're local or not!**

(Laughs).

**But no, there was a huge amount of support from people. And people used to bring us, cook food for us, so I suppose they were locals - yeah.**

Yeah, I know in some of the things that I've read about it there was a suggestion of antagonism between the residents of Newbury and the camp on the common.

**Oh, I'm sure there probably was, there's always rivalry idiots everywhere, aren't there?**

(Laughs).

**But they, I personally, I personally didn't come across that. I mean obviously I was in the right place at the right time - but oh, we did do some marches, and of-course there um, although there'd be lots of people supporting you, there would be quite a lot of negative...**

Energy?

**Yes. Because that was going away from the common - when we went on marches to do different things, and um. Yeah. But actually at the common itself I didn't come across anything.**

So you mentioned there were indigenous American women, came?

**Uum (agrees), they were fantastic!**

Yeah! Were there many women who came from the States?

**Well I only met three - I tell you there was some, an elderly woman from Japan I met there. Um, so there were people coming - wise women from all over the place came, and someone from - where was she? I think she might have been from South America somewhere, and they, so there were...very interesting women who kept, obviously heard the call, and appeared. I just don't know where.**

And where do you think the experience of knowing that the horses wouldn't trample you, or - was there - were they coming from a place that they had used non-violent resistance?

**Must have.**

In their own struggles, or...or was it some sign of innate knowledge?

**Well I don't know, I think possibly it was more the fact that they knew.**

They just knew.

**I um, and they told us, and we believed them!**

(Laughs).

**It wasn't like we were going to prove this, it was just like this is what you do. Well I guess if you come, if you're used to - we're talking quite a long time ago now, and perhaps they just knew that because they'd grown up, and that was something that was part of handling horses that they knew - I don't know.**

Yeah, yeah. Sounds like there was a lot of sharing...

**Absolutely.**

...of years of knowledge and experience?

**Oh there really was, yes.**

Okay, I'm looking down my little...so what was it like having your daughter and your son there, did they enjoy the experience do you think?

**I think - that's a funny question - I don't know if 'enjoy' is the right word. It's not like taking them to um the adventure park.**

Yeah, you're right, 'enjoy' isn't the right word.

Um, I think it was definitely an experience I'm really, really pleased they experienced with me. I was very much a mother that shared, treated my children like friends - so if I was doing something like that, I would have wanted them to be with me, and I think it was definitely a good thing for them to have been involved in.

And..

I think probably they did - retrospectively my son was very proud, still is, that he was part of that thing - because you know, the Americans lost. And knowing that you can achieve that in a non-violent way is a great thing to know, and carry inside, that you were involved in something like that. It's good.

Yes. I think so. And for, for parents who left their children - to attend the camp, was that ever talked about?

Oh I'm sure. I mean you can imagine - what's her name? Lynda Lee Potter - you know, the Daily Mail - oh they had headlines about all sorts of things. But, you know stirring hatred against these people who weren't fitting the norm - it's what's expected of column cannon fodder people, but they er, I think most women rose above that. Of-course there was always a sort of - there's that side of society that's going to read that and go 'ohhh, yes', but um, of-course that's what they want you to think, isn't it? I think it's a shame that there aren't more people out doing it now.

Yes.

But um, there was a negative thing, but none of the people I know came away from it with anything other than being really proud of their mothers, or being really proud of themselves. And the fact that we, as I said to you earlier - the fact that women banded together to look after the children so they could all go to school, and the women could still do that - it was definitely organised in such a way - the children weren't damaged in any way by it. And as I say, if anything it was a, it was a great thing that they were involved in. I think that I personally don't know of anything bad that happened from it at all. And in-fact a lot of the people that - certainly that age group of children now, if they discover that their mother was also involved at Greenham common, they immediately have a bond.

Yeah.

And it's a huge bond, because it singles out the sort of background you come from - definitely. I mean when I bought this house last year there was, there's a house over

there, and there were some people going in and out of it, and it was strange because the woman was dressed in purple, green and white, and I thought, my goodness, she looks like she's just come from Greenham common. And I was out there, and she came out, and I said to her 'I can see you going in and out of there, and you just reminded me of Greenham common', and she said 'were you at Greenham common?' And I said 'yes!' And she goes 'oh, oh, how wonderful', and I said 'why, why, why?' And she said 'oh, I've been reading all about it, and because I met someone that was at Greenham common', and she said 'I've been involved in um, some marches recently, and been involved in all this feminism' and she said 'oh, I'm so pleased to have met someone who was actually there'. And I thought that was really funny - I never actually expected!

(Laughs). The status that comes with it!

**(Laughs). Well that was the first and only time that's happened.**

(Laughs). Maybe it will happen some more as we remind people of what an epic thing it was.

**Well it was, but it wasn't, um, I think apart from the fact of-course that we got the Americans to scuttle off and take their cruise, because they did - they took them away, didn't they.**

Yeah.

**They were gone.**

At what point did you feel you had won, or that you had prevailed? Was it when the Americans closed the base? Or was it at the end of the Cold War?

**I think when they gave up. You could literally see it peeling away at the edges. It was a bit like the shiny gate, and the sun shines on it. It, they, it just - because the police basically weren't going to do anything about us, because we all got on, we were all being very nice and happy and friendly, and there was nothing they could do, because they couldn't - I mean now they'd probably get water canons or something on us, but then - if they couldn't organise us out the way with their horses, there was nothing else they could do. And so, and then, I think probably because they realised they weren't going to be able to bring in the equipment they needed, they just sort of gave up.**

(Laughs).

And then that was very pleasant - watching them trundle off with all their stuff, that was very pleasant, yes. Because they knew that whatever they did we would get in there, and we would be jumping on the silos, they just knew it. Now of-course, as I say, they would get more force out wouldn't they. But at the time we basically won. And then they did, because they couldn't bring any more stuff in, I think they just - their plan was that they were going to have cruise missiles bases all over England. I think there were four or five sites they were planning. But it made it quite obvious that they were just going to meet - I think they thought 'well we just can't be bothered with that - we'll go somewhere else'.

(Laughs). So what do you think it is that stops people doing something similar again? Do you think it was a unique time...for?

I think it was a unique time. All sorts of things were happening, weren't there, and as I said, it was the change of attitude. Women were changing in all sorts - feminism was a new word, it wasn't just a normal thing for women to be standing up for themselves. Then it was, um, we were still fighting for equal pay. Equal pay! And you know, it was very much a new thing - not necessarily new, I mean there were still people who were doing, but it wasn't the norm, and so I think it was, it was there for the taking - that women, something to unite us, and build on that untapped energy. It needed mending. I think we'd been, you know, the male had been very dominate for quite some time, hadn't he?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Wars and then...**

I wonder whether you feel that women have taken a step back since that time? What do you...

**No. I don't think it's women that have taken a step back, I think society as a whole has taken a step back. What was, well we've had a Conservative government - that just shows.**

(Laughs). Yes!

It's - we were, people were socialist then, people understood 'Conservative' was a bad word then, to some of us, obviously - but it was a different, there was far more a radical approach where you knew. We, like I said to you earlier, we would be out of the streets demonstrating if we didn't like something, and there were groups of students going and joining up, and there were big um, people used to go - society was very different, people used to have um, youth clubs and things that they

**depended on - we didn't have all the social media, so the communication was more verbal, and active. Whereas there was very much more common ground - people from different backgrounds would meet up in all sorts of different ways, and I think we definitely need more of that, yeah.**

Are there any other stories that you feel need telling - of people you met, or your own experiences?

**Yes, I could, I mean I could go on for hours and hours. There were all sorts of amazing people, um, I met then. And certainly still know, but I think off the top of my head that's um...**

Yeah, are you still in touch with people that you met at Greenham?

**Oh yes.**

And are they all, what do they do now? What do people go on and do after Greenham? What was it like when it ended?

**Well most people didn't change anything, they just used what they had, and it wasn't like they changed their lives or they stopped their lives, they didn't change anything - they just took time out and organised each other. I think the thing that changes most is that people knew then, that they could give people a lot of strength, and um, I think a lot of people, it made them realise that if you needed something - you could get in touch with someone and ask and they would help.**

Yeah.

**And yeah, very much that's still the same with the group of people we knew, and certainly I, I think, um, I think that has, is still the same in that - unfortunately not everybody's like that, like the first thing I did when I moved here was visit the neighbours - make sure I knew everybody, which is how I managed, but and then I still do, and that's very much part of that sort of thing. People are quite surprised, but you have to, because of what I learnt there, I'd try and live like that - if you see what I mean?**

Connect with other people around you?

**Yes. I think it's really important to that, but um...**