

Heather Platt

So, um I suppose the first question I kick off with is the only set question I'll ask. So everything else we'll just have the conversation. But obviously this is heritage funded, so I guess one of the things we'd like to know is why do you think it's important that Greenham is remembered for subsequent generations?

It was a big deal. (Laughs). It was a big deal. And it motivated so much - not just the actual - it motivated women, and talking, and knowing that you could go 'Actually, no.' (Laughs) And, yes, I think that it is, it historically needs to be um, documented from all different points of view, because I think that the repercussions are still going on.

And why - do you have any thoughts on why it is so little heard of, and why women today often aren't aware of how big it was?

Oh, I mean, from so early on in the actual camp, there was news blackout. It was, it was censored. It was censored. So you - if you knew people who were going there, or you were there, you found out about it. Unless people talked, and you heard by word of mouth loads and loads and loads was just never reported. There was there was a censorship because they didn't want more and more women coming. They didn't want everybody to know about it, because it was disruptive, it was (laughs)...

Do you think that's indicative of how much of a threat it was perceived to be?

Oh, absolutely.

And was it more threatening because it was women? Do you think, do you think because it was bigger than just a protest? In that way?

Yes, I think I think that initially it was like, oh my goodness, how do we handle this? Because the heavy handedness - I mean Portland Down wasn't far away, and lots of CND stuff, and mixed stuff had been going on for years. But when women got together and said - this striking kind of juxtaposition of men in uniforms with guns, and women and children saying 'We will not fight' - we're, it was sort of like that feeling of well, for generations and generations since dot, the women have stayed home, kept the home fires burning and sent the men to war - well not sent them to war - had to accept that the men have been sent to war. And right this time the men can stay home, keep the home fires burning and the women are going to go to peace. So it was just trying to make a really big point of 'Look. We've been silent for generations and generations, and done what was expected of us, and tended the wounded when they come home', or don't come home. And I think that that was, that was just like a statement in itself. That made folk go 'Oh, oh. What do we do? How do we deal with this?' And it freaked them out. It really freaked them out. And, and women in police cells just sitting singing. 'Oh, so what do we do with this then? They don't want to hit us. They don't want to fight. They don't want to riot, they just want to make a point. And be heard.' And, and like when the fence came down that was hilarious in loads of ways, although there were some tragic moments, but it was hilarious because we knew we were not going on to the base, we knew we were just going to take the whole lot down as best we could. So the other side, they were putting up more and more barbed wire, and more and more razor wire. So they stopped themselves being able to stop us taking it down, which was just hilarious. Because they did, they did us a huge favour. And it meant more and more and more of the fence came down, and we had no intention of going in, but they were all ready for us to go in - and we didn't. So it was important, and it did leave them flustered, to say the least. But I think it was 'No, really listen. Really listen, you know, this is..' And it got uglier and uglier the longer it went on. And there's some really, you know, sad stuff happened, and tragic stuff happened. Injuries and a death unfortunately, sadly, sadly. But I think it was that just the extremes of the juxtaposition of women and children, and men in armed uniforms. Yeah.

Yes. And perhaps a slight reversal of power? I mean, obviously, conventionally the power was with the men in uniforms, but it didn't always seem that way.

But this was - that was what was different, like the men with their uniforms, and then rolls and rolls of razor wire and barbed wire. And it was like 'Ah, had, look what we've done here.'

Trapped ourselves inside it?

Yeah, exactly, exactly. They trapped themselves inside, and we you know, had tree winches for bringing the posts down.

Wow! So when did you get involved?

I got involved in 1983. My sister, my oldest sister and her mates had already been going up and down there for weekends.

Yeah.

So I knew about it. And I'd been to, we'd had like, peace camps on Clapham Common, and there was, you know, groups of - and I had a small baby attached here, with babies against the bomb on his - so it was like from that point of view, I'd already dipped my toes in. But I was a very young, very shy, very quiet mum of a small baby. Um, and then one weekend Sally said, 'Come on, come down with us.' - That's my older sister. 'Come down with us for the weekend. You know it's going to be a peaceful one. There's nothing - you know, you and the little one will be safe', and after a weekend of being there, it was like 'Can I stay?' (Laughs). I think this is where I need to be right now. This is something I could totally - and it's an appropriate point in my life where I'm not letting anybody else down. I'm answerable for nobody but myself and my little one. So yeah, via my sister.

And were there practical considerations of moving in with a young baby - or was it just seemed like a fairly straightforward thing to do? (Laughs).

Yeah. Just sort of did it! (Laughs) Yeah, just sort of did it.

I suppose for me, the idea of sort of upping sticks and going somewhere like that seems so sort of heroic in an epic - but everybody I've spoken to said that it felt like quite a natural step.

At the time. Yeah, yeah.

At the time.

And the innocence of youth, you know, I mean, like, I was 21.

Yeah.

And it was like, oh, yeah, cool. (Laughs).

This is something I can passionately - and like I say there'd been months prior to that where - because of what my sister was involved in, and going to women's events, and the peace camp on - Singing for Peace on Clapham Common, and other events that I went and got involved in, it was a very natural step to...

The '80s felt like quite a political time, even though I was a child. I remember a lot of picket lines. (Laughs)

Yeah, of-course I mean, and the miners' wives, I got to know a whole load of miners' wives, so there's a lot of tying up - which again, in terms of the media blackout, they so didn't want...

No, I had no idea of the connection...

And the coach loads - two coach loads of miners' wives came down...

Really?

...to show their support, and then the mutual support and yeah, correspondence, and you know, communication between went on a lot.

Really, so how long were you there for?

In total it was about two and a half years.

My gosh. That is a lot, and were you there full time?

But not not full time - I was there full time, well I sort of was, but what I did after maybe 4 months, I got flat in Brixton in London, just a little basement flat. So that I had respite. And because, you know, for the baby's sake, um, and also it meant that there was a, you know, I kept a real open door policy, so even when I wasn't there, other women would go there and like a couple of times women were really poorly, and it was like, 'Right - my flat'. And also supplies wise, with the, with the little mom it was easy for me - I'd just go up and down by train, and then - so yes I had a base, but I also...

So when you were on - at Greenham, where did you, what did you?

I was Blue Gate.

Okay.

I had a big family size 10 for a while - different things at different times but yeah.

What was Blue Gate like?

Oh Blue Gate was lovely, Blue Gate was lovely. Oh goodness.

The raucous gate?

No we weren't - well, I suppose we sang a lot. The hectic gate that I would never want to live at was Yellow Gate. I couldn't have done that. I mean, I visited there plenty, but I wouldn't have wanted to live at Yellow Gate. But yeah, living up Blue Gate was fun. And we had the woods - lots of woods. And it was, that was a lovely, there was a, there was a lot of aspects there that was just really lovely, and really good for a lot of women - a lot of us felt safe there, where we didn't feel safe. Um, I know that for myself, I was keeping a very low profile from my son's father. And I liked that I was somewhere where he would not be able to find me, or get me. (Laughs). So that kind of was in there as well and, and finding a voice, finding a - not finding a voice so much because I really wasn't - like loads of people didn't know what I was called. They just called me Jamie's Mum. I even got post address to Jamie's Mum, which tickled me - I thought that was fun. I got - I was known as Jamie's mum. But it, it, I think lots and lots of us were going through quite deep internal revolutions of like unlearning. I mean, particularly like my generation and a bit older. You know, our upbringing, and the male role and the female role was so much more defined back then than it is now. You know, we've had, you know, we're into our second generation now, I've got grandchildren and so you know, watching how attitudes have changed just because they've been brought up without those attitudes. I mean, there's still social pressures on gender definition and things, but we had a lot more to - chains, internal chains to break. Does that make sense?

Yes, it does make sense.

Of just really rewriting the script, and realising that some things that you just accepted, it's like 'Oh, thank God I don't have to accept that anymore.' (Laughs). Oh, yeah. Right - a bit more scope to, to thinking and defining and knowing that, for me, it gave me that thing of I don't, I'm not somebody's other half, I can be a whole exactly as I am, as long as there's the support around, you know, and that you can't be a complete person - I think that for loads and loads and loads of women, that that was an enormous side of actually being able to act - to do something to have - like I keep coming back to this having a voice - I

didn't particularly have a voice, but on whatever level that is, whether that's, you know, a silent voice, it's an action...

Gives them licence?

Yes, that actually expressing, and being, could change - for lots of us. And I think that that was a huge part of what was going on - 'cause although being at the camp, of-course there were weekends when there was actions, there was, but a lot of time it was just day to day reality - living. And so you know, there was a lot of woodcraft and craft - well amongst us lot anyway, there was a lot of creativity going on, um, and chatting. because you've got a lot of hours to fill. (Laughs). And there's the practicalities of keeping a fire together, and you know, and I liked my role there because I was always up first because of the little one, and so it would be just - I liked domesticity in the woods - the fire, and the going and collecting water and, yes.

I get a sense that it's sort of creating validity outside of what society has decided you should be must be quite a big thing? Or saying that you are valid just because you are who you are, rather than you're fulfilling a set role?

Yes.

Is, is must be nice, I think, and my mother was a single parent in the late '70s and will often say 'You don't understand!' (Laughs). 'What it was like being on your own with a child back then'. And she's right, I don't obviously because it is not a big deal anymore.

No, it's not - which is wonderful that it isn't. But, you, you were buffeted or even bombarded sometimes by attitude and...yes.

Yeah, I can imagine there was a lot of judgment?

A lot. A lot, a lot, a lot.

And then I guess that was absent at Greenham

Yes. Yes. It was absent. It was great! (Laughs).

If if nothing else! (Laughs).

Yes, yes.

So you took on a distinct role at Greenham? What was your role?

I think I did. Yeah, I think just being Jamie's Mum, and therefore pottering. So I kept - everybody mucked in, but I think it was because we were a very young gate.

Yes.

In terms of you know, there was a lot of like 17/18 - I was one of the older, at 21 I was one of the older ones.

Yes. I just realised I did speak to another lady who had been 18/19, I think, at Blue Gate, and it was a young gate.

It was a young gate. So I was kind of like the mum - in some ways. You're not mum to them, but mum as in I kept, like I got the fire going each - most mornings. I wouldn't say every morning, but most mornings, and I was more on the case of knowing that - kitchen, the domesticity of things were going to function - particularly in the early days. I suppose we had to be much more rough and ready later on because of the evicting and everything, everything.

So were you there when the evictions were happening?

I was there through some bits of evicting. There was some bits where I was very relieved that actually I'd been at the flat.

Yes, it must have been - what was it like being evicted with a baby?

You just kind of did it, you know? (Laughs). Bundled up and kept as much safe as you could. And usually 'cause we have runners or - you know, between gates what was going on. I mean, one of my memories was a raid - that had me in stitches, we were all keeping straight faces - was a raid, rather than an eviction. It was in the build up to the fence coming down. So I'm sure folk will have mentioned Black Cardigans to you?

Oh...

Black Cardigan was the codename for your bolt cutters.

Yes.

BC - Black Cardigan. So many, many black cardigans were being stashed. And for weeks beforehand folk were going out at night, and doing little snips so there was preparation. So there was weeks of, of nighttime, cutting the fence where they couldn't see that we'd been cutting it. And then we also got a tree winch. Now that is a big piece of equipment.

Yes.

And I had the family size tent.

Yeah.

And we - word went round that each camp was being raided, and they were looking for bolt cutters. And everybody - so I had the family sized tent, I had a tree winch under there, and I must have had about 16 pairs of bolt cutters at least - if not 20. So all this machinery underneath (laughs) and all the bedding laid on top of that.

Yeah.

Um, and my darling boy did a massive poo on - so I knew that they were on the way and he had a stinky nappy, so 'Just hold on - I'm sorry darling. I know you've got a stinky nappy, but just wait a minute.' And um, so when they came to my tent at that point, I opened the nappy up, and then 'Oh, just busy in here a moment', and they did a quick pat, pat, pat and left! (Laughs). It was like 'Yesss!' (Laughs).

Oh wow!

And didn't find anything.

That is brilliant!

It was, it was rather brilliant actually. It was like

On some level he was definitely contributing! (Laughs).

He contributed. Yes. Blue Gate baby came up trumps.

Quite literally! (Laughs).

Literally, yes. It's great. It was very funny. It was very funny, because they just didn't search any further, and yet I had all of it stashed underneath me. I was like...that was a magical moment.

There's something about the naivety of the police, and the armed forces in their dealing with women and children that sort of comes through. Do you think nowadays they're a bit more savvy?

Oh, they would be way more savvy now. Now they, they would have just just gone in there.

But I mean, it's a shame...

Because they still had all their conditioning. I mean, it was like 'Women don't do that.'

Yes.

I mean, the stick that we got and the type of things that people said to us, like about cutting your hair off 'All that beautiful hair', and about not being feminine anymore, and, and just the old fashioned ways of how it was - of women just couldn't, women who were still being - you know some of the local women, they just thought we were mad as hatters, and just didn't get it. So I think that there was some of that with the blokes - the police, and the army, as to how do we treat them? Because they'd never seen women behaving like that before. (Laughs). And um, it was very liberating.

Yeah, I can imagine. I wonder whether it's harder now that a lot of those things have been broken, that you know, the taboos around women. I wonder whether actually so many of the barriers have gone, you haven't got the joy of breaking through a lot of them anymore?

Yeah.

It feels that, that, that was quite a joyous...

Oh, absolutely. And something that the next, like your generation and my son's generation, they won't ever experience that, because we were, yeah, changing the rules, changing the rules, big time. And it affected the whole country. Plus, you know, we got, we got mail from pretty much every country you could think about, and visited by people from all over the world.

Did people visit Blue Gate as well? I mean, there's a kind of perception I guess, of Yellow Gate being this hub of administration - but, I, did people come directly to Blue Gate as well?

I think - yeah, I guess they did, once we were a bit more established. And there was Green Gate - Green Gate was quite, further tucked in

the woods, and quite separatist in its, in its stance, which, you know, I found a little bit ...okay, I can see there's validation for it.

Yeah.

But at the same time I can't go down the separatist route because to me it's just not how life works, and I had a son, and I didn't want negative energy being projected onto my boy.

Really even with very small babies?

Oh my goodness, yes.

Wow.

And that's sad you know - and male animals, and it's like oh come on.

Really? Gosh.

It's sad when that happens - I mean I can understand needing - particularly because of the vulnerability of my position at that point was, I - it was so amazing to be in female only space, in women only space, and the safety around that, and the um, it was better than any refuge. And that was where I was heading. You know, I'd jumped out of a window with a baby in my arms. I was safe housing spec, you know, type of - a need for protection.

Yeah.

So even with that amount of understanding, you know, I wasn't naive to the need for, and the extremes that the male of the species can go to - I couldn't get my head round the separatist thing. And the, yeah, anyway, we won't go there. (Laughs). But I think it's all really valid, and there are times when I think everyone should experience a bit of separatism, just because of not excluding stuff, but because of everything that is then allowed to be included. You can sit how you want, you can talk how you

want, you can - and there's a whole layer of judgment is gone. Because of that, so I'm trying not to be - I think it's very valid that the separatist aspects of things, but I feel like that it's a journey to transit through, to then get a load of strength. Definitely for me it was get a load of strength and understanding, that then - but I love my boy. I love my brothers, you know. And there are women in this world that I would never want to be in the same room as! (Laughs).

Yes!

So I find the separatism thing - anyway, ask me another question that takes us somewhere more relevant, because I feel like...

Well, I'm quite fascinated by the female only space, because I think it's something that we've stopped valuing again. And it felt like it was highly valued for all of the good reasons.

Yes.

And, as even, you know, growing up in the '80s and '90s, I didn't experience female only spaces until I had children, where it is now really the only socially accepted place to not have men, because that's the, you know, social stereotype is it's women at home with - and I remember the first time going out with just a lot of women and realising how lovely that was. So that idea of living with just women, or having that space where you are entirely free from men is...

It's wonderful. It is so, it is so amazing, and so much growing can go on because of it, and so much, including of the self, and the sort of the men thing of 'Oh, well, why are you excluding us? That's not very fair.' And it's like, well, you just don't understand how much your very presence - even if you sit there silent and non judgmental, folk are not going to act the same - women are not going to act the same, because they're being observed.

For the same reason that men like a men only sports club.

Exactly. And they assume that of themselves, and the whole working men's clubs - it's a difficult one for folk to - for men and women to get their heads around of it's not about excluding, it's about including. So a women only space is not about excluding the men. It's about actually including the women.

Yeah. You can see that's a positive, it's an affirmative thing rather than a pushing people out thing?

Absolutely. And then yeah, and I do think it's sad that there's not more of that understanding now.

Yeah. Yes.

And considering how much emancipation went on, and you know, awareness. But I look at this younger generation of female and I think, oh my god did the '60s and '70s just not happen? Female emancipation? What, what is happening to the female of the species in the 2000s.

It's a very good question.

It's bizarre.

It is a bit, and when you were talking about you know, the freedom to cut your hair short, and I was thinking even I got stuck when I cut my long hair off, and you find yourself thinking how have we got back to the stereotype of women with long hair and makeup and high heels again?

Yep, yep.

How have we go back to that?

Which you know if that's what you want to do, then fair enough. But

it's - again, there's lots and lots and lots of female just not being included.

Do you think we're too successful? Not we - do you think women were too successful, and that the backlash against it was so strong because they shook ideas up too much, or they threatened the way society operated too much, or is that fanciful?

I think that there's threads of that, most definitely there's threads of that. And I think that not just male, but powerful females. A lot of - if you go for your - like your business tycoons - and the people that have got the money and the influence to make changes, they're not - they'll sooner spend company with the men, they're not very - that's really bad now because I'm going to make assumptions that I shouldn't make. But it's not to their advantage for women to be gobby! (Laughs). Speak their mind.

No, and what - I mean, I suppose as a political aspect of it, as well, in that the way society is structured, it's hard not to think in terms of socialism and capitalism.

Yeah. And it's totally tied up with all of that though, isn't it? And therefore, the, the media, I think all that influence that went on in the '70s and '80s, well '60s, '70s and '80s, but the feminist movement, the women's peace movement - there used to be women's groups - they sprung up from the Greenham thing all over the place. Women having consciousness raising discussions, and there was emancipation groups going on all over the place.

Wow.

And it all kind of fizzled out. But we didn't have mobile phones. We didn't have the internet. We didn't have hundreds of channels of TV.

Yeah.

And all of the American influence that is (makes whooshing noise) onto, you know, this, those that are teenagers and in their 20s now, it's just like, oh my god, and I think that that - there's a certain amount where the culture of what Greenham, and Greenham, and the women's peace movement, and the wider CND peace movement, and the miners and their - that they just wanted to shut that down so much, and that the capitalism, and the money, money, money, money, money just spoke so much louder. And it's - that was where the power sat, so some of it consciously - because it was all a bit scary if people get up and say what they really feel, in whatever context - whether that was because of Maggie Thatcher closing down the the mines, the steel works, the heart of communities getting just ripped apart, and the whole yuppie thing of 'I'm important me me me me me me' - community (makes ripping noise), and then we've just got facades, we've got pretence and facades. And the people that the youngsters are looking to - an awful lot of it's American films, American programmes. And it's this falseness of this is real life. Well no, actually it isn't at all, and, and you have to be airbrushed, and made up and play your character role. Put your face on and your hair on and play your character role, but who were you? I think that was an awful lot of what got scary for the powers that be, was this sense of not 'me, me, me', but there's a 'who we are'. Not a 'I can be as hedonistic, and consume, and make money', and the whole yuppie thing that was going on at the kind of same time.

Yes.

In terms of what had the most power, and that's the money and the politics - and sadly, the further right wing aspects of very, very rich, powerful people.

Yes, individual emancipation is not something that fits well with capitalism.

No, no.

Although in my mind, I'm thinking, I don't feel like Greenham subscribed to either the left or the right in terms of conventional politics, but it didn't sit well with capitalism regardless of whether you signed up to any of the parties - capitalism and empowerment don't go hand in hand. (Laughs).

And it motivated people who weren't even able to be there, you know, during times of difficulties, the donations that poured in.

Yeah. Yeah, just checking the battery (of recording equipment) - it's fine.

The donations that poured in, of clothing, bedding food. It was extraordinary. And like I said - letters from all over the world, there was correspondence every day, it just - so much of it.

How did that get distributed? I mean, did it all come to Yellow Gate?

Yeah. It would go to Yellow Gate, and then some would specifically - like I'd get 'Jamie's Mum, Blue Gate.' (Laughs).

Oh really?

Yeah, 'Jamie's Mum Blue Gate' I got letters to.

And in terms of - I mean, did people come and say 'Oh, we need food at this gate, or we're in really need of bedding?'

People didn't ask. The reality - before the really major media blackouts, news got out. So I mean things like we got a Christmas hamper from Linda McCartney. She sent us treats.

Oh, lovely.

Isn't that lovely?

Yeah, that is.

Some people are you know using your money, others working class, middle class going on, but I just thought how lovely. Yes, you need blankets and things, but here's a treat.

Yes. Bread and roses.

And Fortnum and Mason's hampers got sent - yes that's lovely, and Joan Baez sent things, and you know people who were like going 'I know we can't be there, but we really do support what's going on', and you know like the Quakers, the Quakers all over the country, and the Quakers in Newbury itself, like they constantly letting us use their hall, and being truly Christian in how they were.

I've heard a lot of good things about the Quakers.

Yeah, they were awesome. They were just such lovely people, just really awesome. They baked a cake for Jamie on his first birthday! It was really sweet. They came up to the gate with - they brought him a birthday cake.

That is lovely. Did you have much contact with anybody in Newbury?

Apart from the nice folk at the Quakers, Newbury on the whole were nasty. Not every single one of them, but you always had to wash the spit off the back of your jacket when you got home.

Really?

You got gobbled on.

Gosh.

And what just seems strange - sad was the resources that kept us clean, like I would go and use the laundrette, like lots of us would - use the laundrette. Go to the swimming baths, so that we could use the showers, and keep clean, and they - we kept, as the weeks and months

went by we got banned from the places that we were using to keep ourselves clean.

And why? Why were you banned, do you think?

Dirty, smelly, dirty, smelly, horrid Greenham women! (Laughs). I have no idea but it's just, well, that's not fair.

I mean, were there any...

It was just prejudice. It was just like, there was several cafes in the early days we were able to go in, and then we weren't able to go in anymore. It was almost like they felt like if they stopped us, then we might disappear, to take your essential needs away, and then you might disappear. But of course, that wasn't happening. (Laughs).

It seems sort of very counterintuitive - the idea of banning people from buying cups of tea!

Yes. Using the shower - using the laundry, you know, 'cause there was lots of that in the early days, in the early days, it was yeah of-course.

And were there any foundations to it? I mean, were there any problems? Like I've not heard of a single issue of a Greenham woman reeking havoc in Newbury, so...

No, none. None whatsoever. It was just a known thing that you, I mean, and again, back to the culture of how we were back then. And what was expected - we were sociably a lot more acceptable than your average group of teenagers nowadays.

Yes, yes, I bet.

Your average group of teenagers nowadays, they, they've got no fear of being incredibly rude.

No.

And, you know, effing this, and effing that - that wasn't part of our culture back then. You know, it just wasn't, was it?

No.

Things were much more respectful.

One of one of the ladies I talked to spoke about the sort of overt lesbianism in town being potentially perceived as inappropriate. I don't know if that...

Yeah, that was definitely, that was like 'Oh, disgusting, and oh,' - yeah, that was part of the being spat on. They didn't care whether they, you know, they didn't ask you are you straight? Are you gay? They just spat on you. (Laughs).

I just can't imagine the act of spitting on another human being. It seems so aggressive.

It's gross, isn't it?

Yeah. And really, really sort of demeaning - not to take it as such, but that casting you as being...

Spit-able on...

Very, very, sort of violent in some ways. Emotional.

Yes.

So did you go into Newbury much, or did you tend to avoid it as a consequence? Or did you need to go?

I had to go in - went in when it was essential for me to go in. It was quite a walk.

And what did you need to go in for? Was it supplies?

Supplies, I suppose. And for - early bits with Jamie, like nappies, certain. Yeah.

Gosh. And did you ever go in by yourself? Or did you tend to go in in a group?

Um, quite often we'd - it was rare to go by yourself, just because the vulnerability aspect. But I did. I just, I just did. (Laughs).

Yeah, it must have been in stark contrast to being at the camp?

Yeah. And you knew you had the camp to go back to, so it was like...

Foray into, into the less welcoming...

And have the I will be polite to everybody, and my pleases and thank yous, and you know my manners, and I'll clean myself up when I get back. And I'd try not to react.

Gosh. You must have seen a lot in 2 and a half years of involvement. What were some of your favourite actions to go onto?

Oh, the fence, the fence coming down was just awesome. It was just so awesome. The fence coming down was just, I loved how flummoxed they were. They just were so flummoxed. That was, that was fun. It was fun, and it really made a point - it was like, you know, come on, here's us - a bunch of scruffy women. How's your - I needed to keep myself in as - I did get arrested a couple of times. Um, I got arrested in something in London as well. But I tried to - because of Jamie, not to be arrested, and I, a lot of the time had a camera.

And what was it like being arrested with a child? Did they - did you take Jamie with you?

Yeah, I had Jamie with me, and they wouldn't bring us - you know, I was still breastfeeding, and they, they gave us nothing, and I couldn't change - I wanted to change his nappy I wanted to - I was thirsty. I was - they were pretty crap, really. Pretty crap - they weren't - he only thing that they were kinder on with me was the level to which the strip searching went - I just looked at one that was in front of him, so I was just bra and knickers and they kind of -...

Yes, and I guess he was too young to have any memories of that?

Yeah, yeah.

It seems amazing that they're kind of - be coy en mass, but as soon as they've arrested you, then they can still treat you quite brutally.

Hmm.

Which is - yeah...

They weren't...

Seems contradictory - there were still some social rules while you're outside of prison, but as soon as you're in custody, then you can still be treated badly.

Yeah. And not given basic stuff like water to drink.

Absolutely, to a breast feeding mother.

Yeah, that was out of order, well out of order. They were just like pfft.

Really? Wow. So what did you get arrested for, if you don't mind me asking?

Okay, that, the one I'm remembering there over the nappies and stuff, we were sowing wheat in front of the Parliament Buildings, because it was the whole, you know, there's, there's famine, and you have got mountains of grain. There are food mountains in the UK, and there are food mountains in most countries. And we've got all these, the Air Force all these airplanes that - why aren't you taking the food to the people who are starving?

Yeah.

What is wrong with you? Was basically what that was about. And there was a load of us went up from Greenham, and then other women from London that came and joined in, and yeah, myself and Jamie, and Jay who was Jay Greenham, who was the baby who was born at Greenham.

Aww!

So two mums and the Greenham babies, and we were just, we were - we were planting wheat.

Nice.

We were planting wheat. So that was that arrest. And then the ones in um, at the - at Greenham itself was obstruction, was the - obstruction was the thing.

Did you take part in - obviously, not wanting to get arrested aside, which is fairly understandable if you have a baby, were there are a lot of actions while you were there? There must have been?

Oh, yes. So there were a lot where - I mean, there's stuff that I just admired the women who got in there, and it was I mean, like getting in and spray painting the Blackbird was a big deal. And I know the women who went in and did that, and the planning leading up to it, and other forays into the base - mapping the place out, to know where to go to get

different places, and to get up into the communications tower was a massive achievement. And it wasn't about being mindless vandals - it wasn't. It was saying if we can do it. how safe is the place? Because if we can do it with no army training whatsoever, with none of your - you know your paras, and your SS or whatever, SAS - all that fancy training to be able to get into what is top secret military, and yet we did it.

Yes, yes. With your black cardigans and...

Teddy bears' picnic. That was hilarious. Hilarious.

I have seen footage of that.

Oh, fantastic. Yeah, the teddy bears picnic' was just like 'Yay!', and I think that's what they couldn't understand - that we were making a point. If a bunch of raggle taggle happy women (laughs), and trying to make a point that if we can do that - and one of the things I liked doing - it was sort of, there was gentle actions that weren't actions actions. Like one of my things, because I knew I couldn't get arrested for - I couldn't go in and spray paint the Blackbird or anything like that. So I would talk to soldiers, and get information of at-ease and, you know, being able to get yourself out of there. Um, and it reached a point - I think it was probably after the fence came down, they banned the soldiers from talking to us. But it - there was lovely things like soldiers bringing us oranges, and throwing oranges over the fence, because they knew we were really hungry.

Oh wow!

And we'd be talking to them, and one guy - he put his lapel backwards and he had a CND badge hidden under his lapel. And he said (whispers) 'Sssh, come here, I'm buying myself out as soon as I can.' And really extraordinary conversations with men, like some late in the night - because they were on night duty, and to walk around the fence to places where - then have really serious conversations, and they wanted to know what had motivated us, and what we were doing, and

you know, like some of it was just heartbreaking as well. Like again, you know, some of them so young, you're looking at 18/19 year olds, and he says 'yeah, I'm just back from Northern Ireland,' saying what he'd seen and what he'd been part of, and just so - just giving them as much information as possible. That I - not just me, I'm saying I but we, other people, but I sourced information about helping people get out of the army. And that was just, wow - 'how dare you? How dare you?' And so first they banned them from looking at us - they weren't allowed eye contact, because we were being powerful witches. We were making these men change their minds.

Casting spells! (Laughs).

Yes, yes - that's it, they just couldn't get it that there we were - there was there was like dissension amongst the ranks because of women. Because we were having an impact. They weren't seeing it. There was us one side and them. And some of it was done you know, we'd be singing songs like 'You join the army to see the world, and what did you see? You saw me. Brushing my teeth, digging a shit pit', and trying to talk with these guys, and going 'Look, you're the people that are inside the uniforms, and we're the extremes either side'. I don't know what year, but by probably '85, maybe even '84, they shipped them all out, and they only let the paras, they only had the ones with the (makes whoosh noise), the berets. No, they were (whoosh noise) stony-faced - they'd obviously had extra training, and debriefing and whatever else to go in. Because it became apparent - I mean it was just - I met some really lovely young men stuck in their uniforms, and, and some of it emotional - you know, like the guy got tearful talking about his term in, in Northern Ireland and, and so sweet to come back "Psst, psst, psst, we've brought you oranges.' They're there chucking oranges over the fence for us. It was like wow, so much happened. I hadn't remembered that in a very long time.

I'm glad you did!

It's nice that the little bits of conversation then sort of spark memories.

Yeah. It is that proof that if you allow people to talk to each other, they can actually change each other's minds.

Yes.

And I guess that's another thing to be scared of - if you are trying to maintain a status quo, and keep separation between people.

Yes, absolutely. And it became an offence, like you would get disciplined, if you had eye contact, or spoke with the women.

It seems...

Strongly disciplined.

.... remarkably draconian to refuse eye contact. (Laughs). I'm laughing because it seems so outlandish, but also, gosh, that is so awful.

Shows how scared they were of the powerfulness of a woman just standing there, and looking, and crying or whatever. And just making a human connection. It was like you can stop doing that lads.

There are times when I feel sorry for the men inside the fence.

Very very much so. I mean when we got the hard nuts - you know the Paras, the ones with the burgundy berets - but, and they were put onto the front line, so to speak. I'm sure that the regular army were still doing all of what they did in there. They just stopped letting them be on patrol round the outside of the fence, because of contact with the women.

Yeah. Gosh.

And because of conversations about how to get out! (Laughs). And also bringing us oranges, and I don't know - I mean I think they through

other food at other places just knowing when we were really on hard, hard times and very hungry.

That's lovely.

Yeah, lovely, but the blokes for them, you know the soldiers for them brought us food.

And in terms of other uniformed services, did you encounter the police a lot?

(Laughs). The police! Quite a lot, quite a lot.

What were they like? Were they local? I know that they brought the Met in for various things.

Yes. As things progressed, you've got how it was in '82, '83, '84. But by the time we're talking late '80s, early '90s, you're - ooh things have changed a lot, and I wasn't there then - I knew that I had to, you know, I - my son had to take, you know, it wasn't right to...

So when did you leave? And why did you leave? Sorry, asking two questions at once.

Um, I think one of the sad - part of it was because my boy was growing up. Part of it was because my boy was growing up. Um, I'd moved from the - I'd had to give up the basement flat in Brixton that folk had shared, but I managed to get a squat in um, South Lambeth housing estate - massive, typical London corridors, concrete, um, lots of blocks. Um, and I squatted an empty one, and then slow but sure, I open, open and then other women came and joined me. So lots of Greenham women ended up with flats um, in the whole South Lambeth housing estate - and other other bits that was happening, the similar concrete blocks. Um, but there was... I won't call it a madness, but there was real mental health problems beginning to show. Because the naivety had been stripped away. There was some really hard times, and there was some real

horror stuff going on. Um, and even amongst the women, the anger, misplaced anger, and whenever there's a freedom thing, people are attracted to it for the wrong reasons sometimes. And as Greenham got bigger, and the community of women got bigger, people got involved, who weren't really there from a passionate, 'We don't want nuclear weapons on our soil.' They were angry, damaged, running away. I don't know how much of that's come up in other conversations you've had. But an awful lot of other issues started to be, being needed to be dealt with. And there was violence amongst the women, which was just heartbreaking. I just found that so - it, tiny you know, isolated little - but realising that this because we're women will all be alright together was just not so. And meeting all sorts of different types of people who'd come for the wrong reasons, not come for the wrong - that sounds really judgmental, but they'd not come because they were passionate about the peace movement, or about emancipation. Um, I think like in anything, you know, we got involved with stuff like Stop the City - I got arrested at the Stop the City thing, and these - all these different things overlap, don't they?

Yeah.

And influences. I spent time at Portland Down peace camp for a while, and it was like an extended community. And I think for me, the pressure - partly of the City of London, and the reality of that, along with things getting much tougher, and my feeling of my responsibility was to protect my child. Um, I kind of had my own quiet breakdown. And I knew that there was no way I was going to take my own life. But I understood why people chucked themselves off the balconies of the flats. It's like 'Right, Heather, you need to get out. If that's what you've just been thinking about. And this is how bad your internal life has become.' I'd been too shocked by too many things. And then women smashing each other up with frying pans was just as much as I could bear, and bottles getting smashed. And it was like 'Woah. Okay, I'm gonna take a break.' And I'd met women who had come from Teepee Valley in Wales, to the peace camp. So I knew this place existed. And they'd said 'If you need safe space - you just need a break. You're

welcome.' And I remembered that, and just packed up the baby and me, and went to the Welsh mountains. And thought, I'll have a week. Give me time to think. Within a couple of days, one of the one of the people there she said 'You really need a break. You're in a bad way - you need a break. The chap who owns the wagons in India for the summer - for the winter. You can live in it if you want to.' (Laughs). Yessss! So I went off to the mountains and just took my son - he was 3, he had his third birthday there. We'd been there just a few weeks and he had his third birthday there - a couple of months. So that's why I left - the repercussions and the reality and the ugliness of some of the behaviour that was going on, was just beyond me. And discovering, yeah, the really seedy underbelly of, of stuff. And, and yeah, I, I went off to the mountains. (Laughs).

I can see why.

I thought I've got to focus on my boy, focus on getting me well and strong, and I'm still gonna work for peace. But I've got to regroup. And I've got to get strong, and I've got to - so that was me leaving.

Is it, I mean I haven't heard - actually about sort of violence between women before. That's the first mention of it. But again, I think you've stayed there longer than any of the women I've spoken to. So perhaps it's a being in the place at the time that things are happening.

And that women would come back to the, the, incident with the women and the frying pans was a couple. Was just like this is beyond my comprehension or understanding, and I - I mean, later I did a lot more reading, and kind of understood much deeper how many traumatised, and mental health problems - because of abuse as children, not because o, but triggered by, and that took quite a lot of - so, you know, I educated myself in other ways, to try and make sense of it all.

Do you think it was inevitable that the nature of the camp would change I suppose with time, and the type of people who - like you say are attracted to the perception of what it was that was going on there?

But actually came full of anger. So much anger, getting misplaced misdirected. Um, and understanding the nastiness of women's negativity. You know, we, we set ourselves up as this extremes of you're a man in his uniform, and a machine gun, and the woman in her ordinariness with a child in her arms. But that's just extremes, and stereotypes as well. So, although it was very important to put that juxtaposition of war and peace - in the middle was humanity, raw humanity of you know, in the same way as your chap who talked about the horrors of being in his term of duty in Northern Ireland, that you've got women starting to talk in the safety, then secrets come out, and dynamics change. And also because of um, experiment - it sounds awful to say people were experimenting with the freedom of being lesbian. But they were. It was a - you know, there was a lot of bed hopping, and therefore, ooh difficult emotions, and jealousies, and a lot of people got themselves out of their depth. And I'm just really, really glad that I kept myself separate. And I'm so glad I had a son, because I had a small child to be responsible for, because I don't know where I might have ended in the extremes of things. Because - so there was some lovely lots of really lovely, lovely loveliness. But there was this other whole horror of humanity, and that was part of as well.

Thank you for sharing that. I guess the sort of differences between the gates, and the interaction between them is something that I still struggle to get my head round. So that - how separate they were, or whether they really were just like sort of different suburbs, or whether - I mean, there is a sense that they had their own distinct personalities...

Definitely.

The gates were really, you know, Blue Gate has come across as a very young, and quite sort of vibrant, and a bit irreverent! (Laughs).

Oh, yes, yes, yes, we definitely were! We definitely were! And that was part of our strength. And I think our sanity side of things as well is that there was a lot of larking about. There was a lot of humour. We didn't

take ourselves terribly seriously. We - and avoided where hierarchy was setting up - like Orange Gate, Yellow Gate, Green Gate, Red Gate, Turquoise Gate - it was just like I'm glad I was at Blue Gate. It was like 'Oh, don't take yourself so seriously!' Or be bossy or be, yeah, I think irreverent is a good thing, and knowing how to have a good laugh.

Yeah, I get a sense that there was a lot of joy going on?

Yes, there was there a lot, a lot. Or just chatting around the fire, when there was long hard times, storytelling and - you know, the pouring rain and you're all stuck inside - we had a little belt tent for a while, and that was fun. And women have threads and string and coloured - there was lots of crafting, making and weaving and you know, a little friendship bands - that was a huge, everybody had safety pins with threads on them, so you'd sit down and you start doing your knotting. (Laughs). Um, it was nice. It was nice. It was nice. And yeah.

Do you think that was an age thing? Again, as somebody who was 18, and it sounded like Blue Gate was young, and it must have contributed to a different energy - in terms of the dynamics?

Yes. And I think, um, I think - how do we say that? There was much more camaraderie of all wanting it to be okay. Rather than think - where there was some older energy it, it got a little bit uppity, which is where we were a bit irreverent, I think. It's like, just because you're 30 years older than me, doesn't mean, I don't respect you. But don't tell me how I should be.

Yes. Somebody mentioned to me that they'd never been told to act by men, so they're not going to be told how to act by women at any stage of proceedings.

Yes! (Laughs).

They I, I can't imagine an organisation that even one that sort of organically sprung up - organisation is the wrong word isn't it, but I can't

imagine a group of people without there being some sort of unspoken rules or tacit expectations. Um, and it sounds like Blue Gate didn't give a fig!

Well we didn't. We didn't, and we just kind of quietly got on with it. But it wasn't nasty in that. It was it was good humour, and look, this is what's happening, and we're just being self contained here, and we're not actually gonna...

Were there many people at Blue Gate? How big a gate was it?

Okay, when I first went there that we must have been, there was probably about a dozen permanent at that point. And then you had your weekend visitors, so things would swell. And then we'd have through the week, and woah, busy weekend, back through the week. So you had those that were sort of permanent. And then the weekend, and then through the week. And so I'm just trying to think of when we'd moved out of the wood onto the front bit, that was maybe probably closer to 20 tents. But like in the early bits as well, we were in the woods and we were making benders. And the need for tents and things became much more of a, an eviction thing. Well, not, yes, yes, it did. 'Cause dismantling and destroying and being able to like - I remember one time taking down the family tent and I literally just took it down and dragged the contents. (Laughs).

Inside the tent?

Yes. Just left everything in the tent. Don't try packing. Everything goes in the tent, and you drag the contents like 'That's mine. That's mine. I'll be putting it back up when you've gone.' (Laughs). 'We know'. 'Yeah, bye!'. And we tried to make things be funny.

Yeah.

The - of course they weren't funny. And it was like, but the way we did it was by joshing around. And by taking the Mickey. And just being

irreverent. I like that. I like that. Yeah, that's very, very, yes. That's a good way of looking at it. And then cheering each other up afterwards and having a laugh, and making sure that there was some marshmallows somewhere that would get toasted. Hot chocolate and marshmallows - I know I kept a supply of those! (Laughs).

Important things.

Yeah, yeah. And um, not - yes it was all serious - but not taking ourselves or it all too seriously, that that we'd lose that.

Playfulness about things all along. Made things more bearable?

And that was what to me was so liberating and so joyous as well, and how many - we did so much making up songs, loads of making up songs and telling crazy stories where you pass the story around. And so that it - there was a lot of, yeah, entertaining ourselves and keeping ourselves sane that was that was wonderful.

Was it quite nice to return to the quiet midweek when you'd had a lot of people at the weekends?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. And just like regroup and just - that would be the sorts of times where you know, when the stories got passed around that - because someone would start with a sentence, because we didn't have mobile phones or tablets, thank god! (Laughs)

No, I agree - yeah!

We actually amused each other and sometimes, you know, just start reading a book out loud. You know, that happens sometimes as well.

It's amazing how we become so passive in our consumption of creative stuff now, rather than an active participants.

Yes, yes, it's sad.

It's easy to do because there is all this stuff there all the time. It's the absence of it that means you create more, which is a lovely thing. I'm going to ask a completely practical, unrelated question. What did you do with Jamie's nappies while you were camping? Was he in disposable nappies?

Um, yes.

How did you get rid of them?

**When I was first there he wasn't, I'd done cloth nappies, and then it very quickly became apparent, right - I've got to do - so I would have my own, it was another reason for me regularly going into town - was that I would have a black bin bag full of nappies that had to go in a dustbin!
(Laughs).**

That's very responsible of you.

Oh, thank you. So yes, that was a very practical side.

I could imagine the logistics of boiling nappies is not feasible.

No, it was not going to happen, it was not going to happen. It was like oh my goodness, I can't do this. Because first of all, it was just a weekend, so then I'd taken enough, and I took them all back and had a massive you know, I had a Milton bucket is...

I remember it well.

Kind of that kind of thing. Um, but yes, no, it became...

Untenable after a while.

...it had to be disposables. And....

And how did women deal with their periods as well? Sorry!

No, that's good! That's really good because I just mainly remember the bin - because that was something that came in with the - when donations, it was great that sometimes we'd get loads of stuff donated that was sanitary products. Um, and we had a big plastic bin, that all the sanitary - and what was extraordinary, and I think again, it has to do with being a really young gate. I mean, for me, I, my son was nearly a year old before - I didn't have to worry about periods in the - I was breastfeeding and not bleeding.

Proper lactational amenorrhea.

Yeah, I was, I was feeding.

(Edit in recording).

We were talking about periods.

We were, we were.

And the plastic bin.

And the big plastic bin, and the loveliness of realising that out of those of us that were there, I say I didn't start - I did end up having periods at Greenham but not in the early bits - that the cycle, women did synchronise.

Wow!

There would be like, you know, 3 weeks that the bin was pretty much full. And then you'd go, oh right, everybody is then, are they? And it was it was extraordinary how much synchronising went on.

Wow! And they had to get dropped into town with a black bag as well?

I think a certain amount ended up in shit pits, which wasn't quite so good. Um, but black bin bags of stuff getting down to the dustbin, they're in town.

Yeah, yeah, it's hard to know what to do with them now.

Yeah, I mean, there was a certain amount of burning.

Yeah.

Um, but not so much because you know, it's different when you've got a Rayburn and you can go (makes whooshing noise), and burn it that way. But, so there was a lot of stuff ending up in dustbins, yeah.

Fair enough.

Yeah, just was how it had to be.

And once the swimming pool and the laundrette closed their doors, was it was only the Quakers where you could go for washing?

Couldn't go there for washing or anything - it was, that was another reason why it was really important that I established for me, and for Blue Gate, but for me, 'cause not everybody from Blue Gate went to mine, but established, established places in London.

Yeah.

And there was another, there was, there was something that got known as the Greenham house in London.

Yeah.

Um, washing machine, bath.

Yeah.

So there was a lot of sort of getting smellier and smellier and smellier, and then going to London, having a good old clean up, and coming back again.

So how do people get to London? How do they pay to get - I mean, were you signing on? I know people have all different ways of supporting themselves financially. Or was it donations allowed people to travel backwards and forwards?

Some of it for me, I just would hop on board with my sister and her friends, and they all were working. So there was lifts up and down, because of people coming for the weekend. There was quite a bit of that.

Yeah.

I didn't really have an income - I had child benefit, and that was it. And when I was in London, I just would go busking.

Really?

And get money. Yeah.

And that was, was that enough to support yourself with?

Pretty much. Well, it was those days like, like, once I'd got the tenancy on the flat.

Yeah.

Housing Benefit paid.

Yeah.

And didn't ask many questions, really. I had no income. So yeah, I didn't get the dole. But I did get child benefit. Um, child benefit, busking and the housing people paid the rent.

That's just as well.

Um hum.

Housing benefit did cover the rent for your house.

Yeah, yeah, I was fortunate. That that was so.

Absolutely. So I'm thinking legacies and I'm thinking about the, the lessons, I guess, to learn from Greenham. Do you have any, in your mind things that are important to know about it?

I think that there's a certain amount of it would be lovely to reclaim some of the innocence that allowed so much to happen. It's like women were being emancipated without even realising how powerful what they were up to was. And there was a beautiful innocence to the vision of we will join hands around this 9 mile circle. I mean, that's a lot of human beings.

It is.

And it met up - like that's a 9 mile circumference of fence, and women holding hands right the way around it, and passionately believing that that was a powerful thing to do. And I just - that, that to me, I think is awesome. And I'd love for that kind of gentle innocence to somehow be celebrated, and be talked about, and the fact that - like one of the quotes that I loved from an activist from America, and I don't - can't remember her name now, I'm so sorry, but it was something that I stitch on the fence quite often is 'If there ain't no singing and dancing at the revolution, I don't want to be there.' Because if - it's got to be done with light. It's got to be done with love. It's got to be done with humour. Because otherwise you're fighting fire with fire, and that's not going to

get - you're just going to have an even bigger bloody fire. You're going to have anger, you're going to have - and do things knowing how serious it was. And because of how serious it was, being so disciplined with that - we will sing, we will smile. You can make us as unhappy as you want to, and my god they worked hard at it. But we will still smile, and we will still sing, and you will not break. And that, that feels like it got lost somewhere along the line. I quietly to myself still sing a lot of the different songs, like um, songs that were brought to us from other struggles, and songs that emerged from Greenham itself. There's one from America that's 'I've dreamed on this mountain since first I was my mother's daughter, and you just can't take my dreams away not with me watching.' And it's like that - oh, lyrics and having so much going on in my head.

Feel free to sing now. (Laughs).

(Laughs). Well, that one I don't think I'll burst into song but the 'I have dreamed on this mountain since first I was my mother's daughter, and you just can't take my dreams away. Not with me watching. You may drive a big machine, but I was born a great strong woman. And you just can't take my dreams away, not without me struggling. This old mountain raised by many daughters, some died young, but there's some still living, and if you've come here for to take my mountain, well I ain't come here to give it.' And that resonates for me all through all the decades since Greenham - is - it's, and I'd love more of that energy to somehow get rekindled of - even within individual hearts of, you know, actually, what happened where did we get from there to this? And um, I just think it's so sad - you just watch programmes and it's all these - like we were talking about before, the masks, of the costumes, and the masks and the bizarre pretending that seems to be going so superficial and so pretending, and I find that that sad, because I felt like one of the things that happened at Greenham was all of that facade got stripped away. The painful side of that was the mental health issues it then - in hindsight, of course, that was all going to come out. But the innocence with how it started, um, and thankfully, lots and lots of really good stuff in terms of survivors helping each other, and um, books being written -

therefore people have got role models to hang on to and as well as - I mean for me reading Maya Angelou and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, and - but none of that is mainstream anymore. Well not that it was mainstream mainstream, but it felt like it for me at the time. Of, of, what heritage it's sad.

I grew up in the '80s and '90s. And I think there was a sense amongst my friends that feminism was a thing of the past, and no knowledge of the sort of active participation that you need in order to realise what it means to be a woman, or how you can connect with other women. I mean, women scared me - I think strong women scared me, despite growing up with a feminist single mum. Because there was nothing for us as teenagers, other than ladettes drinking lager, and pretending to be one of the boys.

Yes, yes.

There was no - that strong female identity had already been eroded, I think.

Yeah.

And it is yet to come back, and meeting women through this project has been wonderful, actually - very, very, very inspirational and very nourishing in the idea that is there, and that it's - can be taken up again. That touch paper is there, it just needs lighting. And I hope that I'm not the youngest woman who feels that! (Laughs).

I hope so!

Quite frankly. And I am sure that there are younger women.

I mean, I'm at the moment just so inspired by Greta -

Oh yes, Thunberg, Greta Thunberg.

Yes. Yes.

I heard her yesterday on Radio 4.

And it's just like, there she stands with no makeup on her face, open about her diagnosis of Asperger, which I also have, which I think protected me a lot through that whole Greenham journey, and how many people went - lost the plot somewhat. And I scooped myself and my child separate from it. I thank, I think that the Autism is a strength through that, as she's using it as strength. And I'm just thinking, my god, if I knew myself, when I was 16, the way she's been able to know herself rather than 'Oh, Heather's just a bit mental' - because I didn't get a diagnosis 'til I was nearly 40. Whereas there's a youngster who's had a diagnosis, and so, no, I'm not mental I'm focused. (Laughs). And she's sparked awesome response. I mean, there's, there's people all over the place, and what the young are up to. So I'm very hopeful again, so let's cut the crap. Get all the facades, all the crap out of the way. Right? Are we gonna save this planet or not? (Laughs). And I love her for it. It's just thank you. So you know, it's a different - it's a young people's emancipation going on at the moment - where the kids are going 'No, we won't go to school. We want a future.'

And what do you think about the, again, I'm going slightly off piste. But they arrested 1000 people in London last week for the Extinction Rebellion, which strikes me as an awful lot. And I don't know obviously, I don't know the level of arrests at Greenham because...

Oh, there was court cases, day after day after day after day after day. Yeah.

Farming everybody out to all the...

It was just crazy.

Wow.

And how many women did - in and out of Holloway. (Laughs). 3 days, 5 days, 2 weeks. My sister did 28 days.

Did she?

Yeah.

Gosh. And was she arrested at Greenham, or was that another action?

No, that was Greenham stuff - repeated Greenham offences. She ended up 28 days she did in Holloway, and they made her serve all 28 of them.

Gosh. Yeah, I guess the amount of administrative burden that sheer, processing the sheer number of arrestees must have put on the, on the system. Was that a conscious thing to be disruptive of the state administration or was that...

No, that was a byproduct. That was a byproduct, that was like we are doing and saying, what we're doing and saying, and if you feel the need to arrest us, well then that's your way of reacting. Um, I mean, so little got published - I did used to go down to, well, about three or four, maybe four times went down to Fleet Street with another, couple of times with another person, trying to see why are we not getting published? Will none of you put these stories out there? And there'd be occasional tiny little small print bits of, well, these - this is the court cases that have happened this week, but it was all so hidden, or completely not not publicised. And then the sort of thing that did get publicised was - like that there was a big double spread, poor Greenham babies, like Jay's 2nd birthday, these women from The Sun came down and took photos and did a dreadful article. Missing out all of the truth (laughs), putting in - and that got the spread of like look at the poor boy. It's his birthday and he's playing in a, in a muddy puddle with a stick.

(Laughs). I can imagine most 2 year olds would love that!

Exactly, exactly, you know. And I'd baked a cake, somebody else baked cake, there was presents. They of course didn't take photos of any of that. They just had - so it was Jay and Jamie, so my little one and Jay - and they're boys, they've got sticks. They're playing in puddles with mud. They were happy, as happy as happy. They had a brilliant day. It was a wonderful celebration of his birthday. But they manipulated the whole thing, and it looked like child neglect, you know, and it was horrible. So that sort of thing did get published, that was just so deceitful. And er, I ended up - not me, but they said it was me in several different photos, of bits that got published.

Yeah.

And it was great because it was never me. So there's pictures of my son on various different women's knees (laughs), and (whispers) it was never actually me on the photograph, so I thought about was quite funny.

Something else struck me which has just come back to me, while you were talking about having a child at Greenham, is how isolating modern parenting can be in terms of if you are in a house by yourself and the constant company.

Oh, these boys had so many surrogate aunties who were like...

For the parents

Cuddling and like yes.

And for you as well. I mean, to have constant company and to be doing things with other people as opposed to be doing it...

And them being so proud of him. 'Oh, he's our baby. He's the Blue Gate baby.' You know, he was, I mean, I had the lion's share of being Mum, but it was just so nice that he was known, and loved, and talked to, and adored.

Yeah, all those extra adults. I think when children have a lack of extra adults in our lives.

Yeah. That was, it was lovely. It was lovely.

Yeah. Are you in touch with any of, is Jamie in touch with any of the women from Blue Gate? Was that something that was...

Sadly not, apart from my sister is still in our lives of-course. But no, it's...

Did she visit you at Blue Gate when she came, or was she already involved in other parts of the camp?

Yes, no, it was she was she'd come to Blue Gate, and that's how I ended up at Blue Gate. Yeah.

No, the other lady I spoke to from Blue Gate said the same, that she had - it maybe a function of a young-ness of everybody that..

Our lives all went off in different directions and we lost touch.

Yeah, absolutely.

Yeah. There's a lot of losing touch.

Yeah. I kind of, to return to Greta Thunberg, and Extinction Rebellion, it is the first time I've seen people act outside of the box, I suppose, for a long time.

Yeah. It's the first time something is resonating of like, wow, that - this is the energy, and that's the energy - people just were moved to go to Greenham, and then that's what's happening people are going 'Yeah, too flippin right.' You know, from one girl sitting outside her, whatever it was, she sat outside in Sweden.

Parliament building

And look. Yes! And it is, it is that energy that it's reminding me of.

And the feminism - sort of linked into the peace movement and the politics, were they all sort of mashed up together? Did any of it take precedence in the end? Or was the peace movement the core that held it all together? Or do you think in the end, it just became...

I can't really speak for how it was in the last bits of time where it was (makes explosion sounds) riot, police and hardcore. You had to be so hardcore to be there in the last couple of years.

Really?

Yeah, yeah. And I think, well, I know you know, folk were - I think there was a lot of healing needed afterwards. Because as to quite how entrenched in the (makes crunching sound), if you get what I mean - what had been 'Hi, we're on this side', and 'Oh, we're on this side, and we're going to be...' - the years that went past it was, um, cruel. I think that there was cruelty. I mean, there was cruelty back when I was there - they were reversing horses over women, because we were talking to the horses, and the horses refused to walk over the women. And so they turned them round and they were reversing the horses, and the horses were like, no, no, no. And there was broken arms, and broken, crushed bones.

Really?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. And that was back in - that reversing the horses thing must have been '83 and '84. That was, so we'd be around the front of the horses - 'Stop talking to the horses.' (Whispers) 'It's alright mate, we know you don't want this.' And they were refusing to step on the women. Yeah. But yeah, to turn the horse round and then reverse it and (makes crunching noise). So they were being cruel to the animals, and it was oh... one woman she had a broken back because she

got thrown on the curb and her back got broken. But there was a lot of yeah, crushed bones nasty, nasty, nasty. But in the later years where I didn't, wasn't there, I was away, I hear it got really...

Brutal?

Brutal. Yeah.

Did you miss it once you'd gone? Or were you...

There were aspects, there were aspects, but it was time. It was time - just on my personal, emotional well being. And I'd witnessed - there was a certain level of PTS going - post traumatic stress disorder going on for me. I'd witnessed too much without a break for too long, um, of what was happening within the city amongst the women. Um, and the women, extended women's community - that were backwards and forwards between the city and the base. And I knew I just had to separate myself from it all. Because otherwise I would have gone down the self destruction route.

I think there's a large variety...

Took a toll.

Yes. I can imagine it must. Well, it's a testament to your self presentation that you were able to identify when, when that level of self care was needed, I think. And I guess being there permanently is very very different to dropping in and out, which I think a lot of women came and went, and came and went.

Yes, but then you could recharge your batteries and come there with just all the positive positives - I kind of - the underbelly that was very apparent within London, within this housing - you know, I had Sarah and Arlene, the mum and girlfriend of the Yellow Gate baby, they had a flat just down from us but on the same block, and then there was women across the block, and across the block. So it was, there was no respite

from some of the uglier stuff that was going on. And, and some of the older women and the Yellow Gate women being unapologetically angry and rude. So the sort of, the energy had been so like, 'Yesss!', it was like, whoa, oh, dear me this is heavy. It all got quite heavy.

(Laughs).

And it was like ohhhh, I need to leave now.

I suppose all things must run their course, ultimately. And there is only so much conflict that anybody can take actually, without taking time out from it. And for all the humour, if you're using humour as a way of dealing with trauma, it doesn't mean the trauma doesn't exist.

That's, yes, yes, it had to be dealt with later. Yes, it did. And it's a shame there was times when I tried to keep up with women when - like I went off and went down to Brighton where some women had moved, and there was women friends up in Leeds, and in Sheffield, and in Manchester so, and in Glasgow, and I tried - so for quite a while I did try to keep these connections, and, and feel like this was my extended family to some degree. But I exhausted myself and thought well I'm doing all this travelling to go and see them - nobody comes to where I am! So I think I'll give up now, and if they want to know me, they'll come and find me. But treasured, treasured, that that all happened. And the joy of going back there after the fences were all gone and just walking, walking across the common - that was just awesome. Personally, I'd love to be able to leave it for my son, so that he could understand a bit of where his wacky mum came from, and that he was Blue Gate baby, I think I should know a bit of his history.

I get the sense that it was obviously life changing.

Umm. (Agrees)

And your life now - is it something that could ever have happened had you not gone to Greenham?

The whole direction of my life, from then onwards because of the internal changing, how I was thinking, changing how I was allowing myself to think. Inspiring to - so the sort of writers that I wanted to find out about, so, reading Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Marge Pearson - Marge Piercy - that's just like (makes fast movement noise), but so many - of just allowing my mind to be opened up a bit, and and then question, and have very different viewpoints - because you met so many people because of it, and you listened to so many stories from so many different angles, and it was great having loads of illusions shattered. Really great having lots of illusions shattered and it's like whoa, cool! (Laughs). And then taking that self off up the mountains in Wales and yes, I'm glad that (laughs), yes things would have been very, very different.

Yeah. Is there any thing else that you'd like to talk about? Do you feel?

I feel that's where I'd love the other two interview - the two recorded interviews, and then all of the stuff that was on the DVD. I would be fascinated for that to be found. And to listen to it, and watch it, possibly with yourself - to then go 'Oh, yes, that, that, that,' because it's even more years further on now.

Be like reading your teenage diary! (Laughs). Not teenage, but you know what I mean?

I'm feeling it was about - it was the 20th anniversary or something like that, when the other stuff was getting made.

Yes, it would be lovely to be able to have a sort of dedicated space for all of this to be, and I know there are collections around the country, but it'd be great to be able to keep building on this.

Yes, yes. And I'd be fascinated as to, you know, that this bit of journey might then mean that there's - meeting people who we knew who we were back then, but we wouldn't recognise each other on the street if

we walked by each other now, and then some meetings up might happen.

Yes. Which would be good.