

**Hilary Whyard**

Right, now thinking about Greenham - when you first went you said you didn't stay over, you just visited?

**No, I never stayed because I had small children, and there were some people who did leave their children at home and live at Greenham, but that wasn't really for me.**

Did many of them stay there permanently for a long time, or do you think people came and went like you did?

**There was some people who stayed for years, years and years. And yeah, some people came and went, some people stayed over a couple fo nights maybe - it varied depending on the time people had and the passion they had for it! (Laughs.)**

Did you go to any in-particular gate, or did you just...

**I went around the gates, because the first time I went, or it may have been the second time - my son was 5 months old and he was born in 1982, so it was 1982, because I took him on my back and we did and Embracing the Base.**

Oh yes, yes.

**....it was one of the yearly celebrations that took place in the autumn, most years, and I always went along to those - yes as I say, one year I took my little son, and I would go to things like that to start with, and then I got more interested in it, and although I didn't feel I could stay because of my little children, I did go, I belonged - I lived in Gloucestershire then and I belonged to a peace group and the peace group collected food - as we would these days for food banks, we do that these days don't we?**

Yeah.

**But in those days our group did it for the Greenham common women, and I would go about once a month and deliver food, and I would go around the gates.**

Oh yes.

**At various gates, and it depended what was happening at various gates as to which one I would finally stay at.**

Did you find much difference between the gates? Because some people have said there were a different sort of elements?

**There was a different slant on it, yes, on the different gates. I think there was a new age gate and a more activist type gate, and so on. There was quite a punk-y gate at one time as well (laughs). People had lovely coloured hair and so on. Um, but I can't - it's so long ago I can't actually remember the character of each gate, but I seem to remember staying at Green Gate quite a bit, but I can't remember why! (Laughs).**

Perhaps it fitted in with you. What made you go to Greenham in the beginning? Because you belonged to a peace thing anyway?

**Yes, well I'd been passionate about - certainly anti-nuclear, I was a member of CND and did quite a lot of the Aldermaston marches then - did that with the whole family, um, but because it was a women's thing my husband at the time was very supportive, and he had the little ones - apart from the time when Sam was too young to leave, because I was still breast feeding him, so I had to bring him along.**

Had to take him?

**Yeah, and that was the autumn of '92.**

'82?

**Sorry, '82. Yeah. Um, yeah and um, so I, the first time I went I was just fired by the bravery of the women, I mean they were just incredible - they had to put up with so much. I mean I experienced some guys stopping a car and throwing a bucket of urine at them, and yelling abuse - there was a lot of abuse yelled out of open doors, open windows of cars.**

Did you think it was mainly because they were women, or did you think it was mainly because...

**I think a lot of it was to do with women taking things into their own hands, which is a lot of men feel very threatened by that - or did in those days, obviously it's probably easier now with women in politics and women in business and so on, but in those days it was quite new for women to be taking the lead, yes.**

What do you think meant decided for it to become a women only camp? Was it a conscious decision, or did it just evolve?

**Well I think, there was a group from Wales that trend up - a women's group, and they, I don't think it was exclusively women to start with...**

No, we've heard that.

**...but the men dropped back because they felt that it should be - you know, a women's thing, and actually the year I went with my baby, the men were running a crèche, I mean there's a story - do you want me to tell you story about that?**

Yes.

**I went into the um, crèche tent to sit down to breast feed Sam - my son, and um, there was a baby in there that just wouldn't stop crying - it was tiny, only a few weeks old, and the mum had dropped it in the crèche first thing in the morning and hadn't been back, and this was gone lunchtime, and I was in there. And the men were in a terrible state not knowing what to do - they were walking up and down with this baby, but it wouldn't settle, they tried a bottle but that wouldn't work, and I thought oh maybe it's a breast fed baby! (Laughs).**

Yes, they don't like bottles.

**So I said come on, give it to me, I'll feed her, and I did, and she took to the breast with me very easily, so she was obviously a breast fed baby, and um, so she settled down then and went to sleep after I'd fed her.**

Aww.

**So I still had a bit left after I'd fed Sam!**

I bet they were relieved!

**Yes they were! But after that I don't remember men at all, so whether, um, but then after that I left Sam at home, so I didn't have much to do with the - I didn't need the crèche, so I don't know...**

I wonder how long they kept it going?

**Yeah, I'm not sure.**

Did you feel that the non-violent actions as a good way, a peaceful protest was a good way of protest?

Yes, it was my way - you know, and if anything did get too violent - I don't mean at Greenham common necessarily, but at other demonstrations, I always stepped back into the trees and didn't have anything to do with that, because I do feel that, um, you can have civil disobedience without having violence. So yes, I used to sit down in the road at Greenham common, but I wouldn't have - I mean there's a lot of women cut the fences open and went in.

Yes they did.

There was one lot of women when I was there, just got back - well I don't think all of them got back, but um, some of them were arrested, but they'd broken into the actual planes, and sprayed the inside of the planes pink...

Did they?

Yeah, and sprayed the inside of the planes pink, so that was an interesting one.

How did the military treat you when you were there?

Almost ignoring. I tried start conversations, but they were very - they stood at the - often at the especially at the big demonstrations they would stand at the fence, but they'd have their back to you, usually - so they didn't...

So they wouldn't engage with you at all?

Yeah. And sometimes they used policewomen on the outside of the fence there were some policewomen, sometimes, in a row, but...

Did they engage with you?

**Not enough to go all the way round!**

Did they engage with you?

No, they were all trained not to. And I think in those days - these days, I don't know - police are probably a bit more humane, I'm not sure, but in those days they were told not to. But I think there were - there were relationships between some of the women and the soldiers, I know some of the women who lived there regularly and I don't just mean the people that were brought in as extras to guard the fence, but the usual people who were on the gates - some of them were friendly with the women I think. Would talk. But I never experienced that.

I suppose you have to be there all the time really - to get to know people.

**Yes.**

Were the police in general aggressive with you, or were they alright?

**No, I didn't experience any aggression. No, but then as I say if there was anything going on that was too active, I tended to step back, because I couldn't be arrested having a babies at home - I didn't want to be arrested.**

How do you think the local people around the local residents felt towards the camp?

**Oh it was very mixed. There were some people - I imagine they were the more right wing people, were very against it, and there were committees for trying to get rid of the Greenham women, but then there was some locals who stopped and dropped off a bit of food every now and then, so it varied depending, I think, on what people's political persuasion was, and how they felt about nuclear.**

Even just feeling what they felt about nuclear power, really?

**Yes. Yes.**

So they got plenty of food coming in?

**Not always. They were a bit short sometimes, because when I went I was taking food. But I think, yeah on the whole they did manage.**

Yeah, we've talked to some people who had a van they used to collect food and go round on a regular basis.

**Yes, that's what I did - about once a month I used to drive down from Gloucestershire.**

That's good.

**But I remember one time I went one of the men in my peace group had had a real good harvest of carrots, and he gave me a whole sack of home grown carrots. And I took it to the gate and they said oh we can't have all those because the bailiffs are around and they're - I always forget that word - when you're...oh god, what's the word, words are going from me now.**

And me!

**When you chuck somebody out - when the bailiffs came round...**

Evict?

**Evict! Yes, that's right - they were quite regularly evicted at that point. I can't tell you what year it was - I came for quite a lot of years, but um it was in the middle - so it would probably be around '84, but I can't swear to that. They were evicted quite regularly, and it was a way of trying to shift them, because they would come with um, dustbin lorries and the bailiffs would be there and they'd read the Riot Act and say 'you have to go', and anything the women couldn't pick up and carry, they would take and put in the dustbin, and it would be crunched up in the dustbin van.**

So a big bag of carrots would have been taken?

**Yeah, that's why at that point they said 'take them round - a few at each gate', which is what I did.**

Oh gosh.

**But this eviction was quite scary, and the men were not supposed to - what the women were doing at that point, they'd got prams, and if they um, if they wanted to keep - anything they could put in the pram - in theory they could keep. They would walk off with the things in their pram, and that would be something that the bailiffs couldn't touch, but I have seen things grabbed out of prams and thrown on to the rubbish.**

Gosh.

**Yeah, so lots, and also the benders that they'd make - you know the shelters with hazel saplings and things that would bend over with a tarp over the top - the tarps were ripped off and thrown away because it was difficult for the women to get at those - undo that all quickly when the bailiffs arrived, because they never knew when the bailiffs were coming.**

Well, no.

**So they often got torn off and thrown, so they'd have to start again with new tarpaulins and things.**

Gosh.

**Yes.**

So it's constantly replenishing the...

**Yes, they literally could have, but because I took my transit van - I was running a business at the time, and I had a van, um, I used to say 'come on, put stuff in the van', so they'd throw the stuff in the van except some women used to say 'no, no, we shouldn't do that, because that's not us dealing with' - you know as soon as you arrive at Greenham you're thought of as a Greenham woman, but I was a visitor really - I was only there dropping off food, so some people thought it wasn't right that I should fill my van with things - that they should face the men and...**

Dedicated..

**Yes, they were very dedicated some of those women.**

How did the children get on that were in the camp - did they get educated, or were they too young?

**Do you know I know nothing about that - I never saw any children.**

Somebody else said they didn't see children.

**I saw them in the um, the yearly get together - the celebrations, but not at the normal...**

Not living there?

**No, no, I never saw any children.**

Gosh.

**I think some women had actually left their children and husbands to go and live at Greenham, and it was a kind of protest, and they were taking on the role of being a mother - not particularly looking after their own children, but making a statement about 'I'm thinking about all the children who are going to follow on from me - after my time, and I'm speaking out for them, and want to protect them'. So it was a very brave, and very difficult - I'm sure, difficult thing to do.**

Do you think that legacy has carried on to the next few generations?

**I don't know really, I'm trying to think - I think things have changed, the world is so different that I think we protest in different ways, very often - these days. Although I think there are still some protest camps going on around the country.**

And some children protesting at the moment.

**Yes. And of-course children are taking it into their own hands now - the children are saying 'no, we've had enough, your generation is wrecking things for us', and I'm just so excited by that.**

Yes, I was as well - things coming to life, protest.

**And a lot of those women - a lot of those children have got grannies who were from my generation, and you know I talk to my grandchildren, and my children have passed on the legacy because they go to protesters - still go to climate change protests and things - now taking the children, so they, you know, it's been passed on.**

Yes. So you feel being a peace activist has permeated?

**I think it has - I think hadn't we been doing that at Greenham common there wouldn't be as many children as aware - maybe I'm being a bit arrogant there, but it's the way we've brought our children up, and talked to them from when they were very little about these issues.**

You're obviously quite an artistic person, I wondered was there a lot of art going on in the camp, that you know of?

**Do you know I'm going to have to drop you on that one because I can't think...**

You don't know.

**Well apart from the decorating of the fences of-course - there was lots of that going on - lots of spiders' webs being woven with wool. We always took wool along when we went to these yearly - I call them celebrations, I don't know what other people call them, but anyway we would always - you know the spider's web was the symbol for Greenham, so - breakable but strong, as a symbol...**

So do you think that is the artistic symbol of the camp - the spider's web?

**Oh definitely, I think so. And also there were lots of lovely things - people had made hangings and brought the along and hung them in the trees, so yes there was, I thought you meant like a workshop with all the stuff out.**

No, I meant like decorating the fences.

**I mean that was another very powerful symbol to take this very, um male symbol of aggression, you know pointing these awful cruise missiles at Russia.**

Yes.

**All rip wire and the barbed wire and the fences that kept everyone out - for women to come along and decorate it was, I think, a very powerful symbol.**

Yes. I think you're right. Um, and what about the decision making in the camp - was it very much a collective decision making, or was there somebody in charge?

**Do you know, I don't know. I know that sounds - but because I never stayed, I felt a little bit like a visitor a lot of the time, although I know I wasn't really, um I didn't - I wasn't in on any of that stuff really. I can't tell you anything about that.**

Um, and what about the way the camp was portrayed by the media - do you feel that was...

**Again it was mixed depending on what you read - which papers, or what journals. Some people were very supportive and showing supportive photographs of the women looking strong and so on, and then there'd be other places - other papers that would call them 'trash', and you know 'wrecking the beautiful Berkshire countryside' and so on - whereas the women were trying to claim it back - it was a common after all.**

Well yes.

**And the whole idea of the common is that it's for everyone to share.**

Do you think the politics of the people was represented by the way they either criticised or applauded?

**Yes, I think so. It tends to go along, doesn't it - with your ideas. Your politics and your ideas about peace and nuclear disarmament and so on.**

Um, how did you feel about the camp once you'd left it - did you carry on visiting it after all it's time there, or?

Um, no, not for the whole time. Um because I, my marriage broke up and I didn't have the support at home that I, that I got before so I couldn't visit - and I had to get down and get on with making a living! (Laughs). On my own - so I didn't have the spare time. I went back to teaching - I used to teach at one time, and I ran a business for 13 years which gave me the freedom to come and go to Greenham, but that had to finish and I had to go back into teaching, so I didn't really have the time.

What did you teach?

**Oh, everything! Every age and every thing more or less (laughs).**

Which is good.

**Yeah, yeah.**

Why do you think the Suffragette movement is more remembered than Greenham?  
Or do you think it is?

**That might just be to do with time, I don't know. Maybe the Suffragettes have got the advantage of us looking back on it as history, and maybe Greenham common so far hasn't been seen as history - but you guys are hoping to do something about that.**

You think it's too close?

**Yeah, possibly too close. Maybe, I don't know, maybe something to do with there was more class distinction in those days, wasn't there, and an awful lot of the Suffragette people were from - I don't know, maybe it's just the ones you hear about, but they were from more aristocratic families, which made it shocking...**

And more memorable?

**And more memorable probably - in a different way to from the...**

So you think Greenham were..

**It was ordinary women who were just coming along and doing their thing.**

Because it started off with the march with the Welsh women, didn't it?

**Yes, the women that came from Wales - they started it off and stayed, yes. And then more and more people joined them.**

Did you carry on with the peace movements you were in? After Greenham?

Oh yes, for a long time I was um, lived quite near to one of the air bases which the bombers went from. Yeah, when the - there was the Iraqi bombing, I was quite near to the airbase the bombers went from, and that was quite a long time after - we went along as a family and protested against that at the airbase there. But gradually over time, I think, I am protesting, but I'm doing it in a different way now I think, I'm very involved in the Transition movement and trying to make towns, or communities - looking at the communities that we live in, because I think that's the way to go now, is to actually start from your own community and work out, and there's a lot of issues we're looking at in our group - particularly things like single use plastic, those kind of things, but also we are planting lots of food trees - fruit trees - around the area, like a sort of scattered orchard fall, so that people have got resilience in the future - at least there'll be fruit and nut trees around if there isn't anything else, so we're trying to encourage to - in the community, to join in, and I don't know if you know about the Incredible Edible movement where people are, um ripping out the prickly bushes outside the local dentist and putting in things to eat.

Yes.

And we're doing the same all around out library and various shopping centers in town, and we're trying to make it educational in that we're writing chalk boards to say what's happening in this garden - 'this is the time when, blah blah blah', and we can hear parents showing the children and saying 'look, this is what's happening now', and they're reading from the board, and we hope we're making a difference, so children are understanding where food comes from - that it grows from the ground, that it isn't just from supermarkets, and so on. So I think we still, and we're tackling pollution in the area and litter picking - we're doing all sorts of things. I'm very busy with that.

So it's an extension of the peaceful protest?

**It is, it is.**

Towards something else?

**Towards my community - where I live, and I think more and more people are doing that now, it's spreading in little centres as it's spreading out, and more and more people are becoming aware.**

Because it does spread into the rest of the world, doesn't it, because it relates to climate control.

**Yes that's right.**

And all that. Do you think some of the women there, do you think they came to escape any abusive or violence at home? Do you think it was a way of them escaping?

**Again, I don't really know. I mean certainly, nobody - I didn't really have long, deep conversations with the women who lived there - the only thing I was aware of was the electronic zapping that was happening towards the end - they were getting actually um, there was something happening. I don't understand it - I don't understand the science of it, but there were some - they had some dials which were measuring the electronic - I don't know if it was microwaves that would definitely being directed towards them. The further away from the camp you went...**

Was this coming from the camp?

**Yes, it was definitely coming, because the women were totally different - they were wiped out, they were they could hardly speak to you - they were flopping everywhere - couldn't hold a conversation, whereas before it was singing and various things going on, or talks about what had happened the night before. But towards the end they could hardly raise an eye to look at you. When I say towards the end, I mean the time that I was there, so I don't know - it may have been a thing that happened for a little while and then stopped, I don't know - and I just happened to witness it.**

Gosh. Did they recover quickly, or was it a permanent thing?

**Well I don't know, I left them there, and I don't know quite how they were - if they recovered, I really don't know.**

Gosh.

**It was just something that I saw one time when I went. And it was quite a different atmosphere there - the resilience had gone, they were feeling quite hopeless.**

It couldn't have been a permanent thing then could it - if you left in what '86 - did you say?

**Yeah, I think it must have been about then yes.**

Because they carried on protesting after.

**Yes, they carried on, so I don't know if it was just something they tried for a while.**

That's terrible really. Quietened the women down. Um, if there's one thing - big thing that you would think has affected you from Greenham, and is represented by Greenham from now on, what would you think it would be?

**I think it's the example that the women who were there all the time set about determination and, um, being determined to, to, er, make that difference and provide that contrast with what was going on in the base and around the base. I think that has affected me and I have actually felt 'right, if they can do that we can do anything'. I think it's affected me in my Transition movement work - you just carry on. There was the song about 'it goes on and on and on', isn't there - I can't remember the tune now, and that's how I feel - I've never stopped doing something, somewhere to help. And they've changed the world.**

And the peaceful part of it, in contrast to the aggression was important?

**Yes. Exactly, yes.**

Gosh. And obviously you're carrying on as well now, wasn't there. Was there a lot of music that went on?

**Yes, people had instruments - guitars mostly at the um, gates, and there'd be quite a lot of singing going on - certainly in the big gatherings, certainly there were groups of musicians that came along and added to the atmosphere of the day. But in the normal run of the mill times there were guitars and things at gates, and people were singing songs that they'd made up about the base and their movement and so on.**

So it was essentially a happy and united and peaceful place to be?

**Wasn't always happy.**

Wasn't it?

**No, no, because they had a lot to put up with. It was difficult, they had a very, very difficult life. If you're bending over a sapling and throwing a piece of Polythene to sleep under...**

And then somebody removes it...

**You're not going to get up full of the joys of spring - you're going to be aching, you're going to be wet, you'll be cold - so no it wasn't always a happy, jolly pace. Obviously it was as well, but it was a tough place to live.**

A lot of hardship.

**Yeah, yeah.**

Did they do any cooking in the camp, or did they rely on people to bring supplies in?

**I seem to remember little fires going, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think they did cook at the gates.**

Yes. A lovely thing to have been part of, isn't it.

**I'm always glad, and I'm so grateful for you guys coming along and catching it all - because we're all getting on a bit now! (Laughs).**

Well yes, I think that's one of the things we need to capture.

**Yeah, before we all pop our clogs! (Laughs).**

Some of us are ready to pop them anyway.

**(Laughs). Well I tell you what, we'll go out singing!**

That's lovely.

**We really will! (Laughs)**

Um, is there anything else you'd like me to record before we finish? Anything really special that happened while you were there? Or that has happened since because of you being there?

**I think, yes, I think the celebratory side of the large gatherings is something that I took forward to other protests I went to, and marches and so on. I remember that side as being very important to me, and the decorating and the making a lovely banner, or making a lovely decoration on the fence - I think that has carried through as well, and that is something that I have enjoyed and was glad to be a part of. Yes. And glad to be part of just being something where women had the chance, or gave themselves the chance to speak out for one of the first times, really. Yes, yes, there was the Suffragette movement, but this was the next thing along really.**

And this was totally peaceful. Do you think the peaceful protests are more effective than the more aggressive protests?

**Yes, yes, because they don't get people's backs up. The ordinary folks don't feel they've been appalled by what's gone on - the violence or whatever. I think the guys who protested in - was it Stanstead - the airport recently, where some people got sent back, and those fifteen people got so much support for their protest against that, and I think that's really important to protest in a way that is an example for how you want the world to be.**

Yes.

**There's no justification for...**

Aggression?

**No. I mean aggression against things sometimes, I mean the women did cut the fence and they did make holes in it, but as far as I know nobody ever hurt a soldier or a policewomen or attacked them, it was all...**

The women that ended up in prison, were they roughly handled at the time?

**I saw some pretty - yes, I mean I learnt not from Greenham, but before that, I learnt ways of making yourself a dead weight, so that you're hard to pick up (laughs). And there is a way of grounding yourself and rooting yourself in the ground, and it is actually really hard to pick somebody up whose rooted themselves like that.**

Gosh.

**And so yeah, I saw some very frustrated people trying to lift these very heavy women - who weren't very heavy really, it was just a magical trick - I don't know how it's done, but it works - you can actually, so long as you think of yourself as being rooted into the earth, you let yourself go and it makes you six times heavier than you normally are! (Laughs).**

Because they always say a dead body is heavier than an alive one, don't they.

**Yes, I don't know why it happens, but it's very effective. And very non-violent of course - you're making a bit of a fool out of the person who is trying to lift you! I've seen some quite burly policemen sweating picking up these small women who have done this - who have grounded themselves!**