

Jade Britton

Tell me a little bit about your background first, sort of pre-Greenham.

Okay well, I did um, a degree in English late. I was a mature student. So I did that for 3 years, and my first job after that was working in a school as a bursar, oddly enough. And I lived in a town called Tamworth, which was outside Birmingham and what happened was, I met other women in the town, and we became the women's group in that area. And so, I know, anyway, so um, we were um, the um, er, we joined things like Women for Life on Earth and we um, we were the Prisoners Wives group, we worked in the Labour Party to have a separate women's section, we were the Battered Women's Refuge group and we campaigned for an ran a phone line to help women that were suffering violence at home, and we actually got a refuge from um, the local council, which was quite unheard of at the time. And so when the chance came, a group of us all decided to get a coach and go down to Greenham.

What year was this?

Oh I can't remember.

Roughly?

1980s...I honestly don't know.

Did you know Sue...Ann Pettitt?

No.

Who did the walk from Cardiff to Greenham?

No, but I know Rowan - Rowan Gweddon, she was one of the women who did Embrace the Base and danced on the silos, and was arrested and sent to prison for that. She ended up a Violet Gate.

So you arrived early-mid '80s?

Yeah.

Somewhere around there?

Yeah.

Um, what happened? You arrived - you were there, what happened next?

What at Greenham?

Um-hum (agrees).

Well, as I say we went down with a coach load, and I don't know - I just felt an incredible pull towards the place. Um, and I spent the next 3 or 4 months going back and forward, and going every weekend I could, and eventually I decided that you know, that was where I was meant to be, and so I quit the job and moved down there, so um, I sort of ended up...it coincided South East Women for Women on Earth were doing a walk from Greenham and Menwith Hill, so that was to call attention to the whole nuclear issues, and so myself and another friend called Kullah, um we decided to join that a ranch. They were saying 'oh yeah, come with us, it'd be so nice to have you'. We were talking one night around the fire, and some of the women from that project were there, and so we decided we would do that, as you know - I would move down to the camp, and sort of - after the weekend we would join with them, and we would do the marching with them. So that was an incredible journey, because for the first 2 weeks we were literally marching along between small rural towns and small rural areas, um, meeting an incredible amount of people who would hear about this little band of women sort of tronking along the road, and the children were in a bus driven by male supporters, and we'd pitch up in places where you know, they'd have heard of us coming, and I can remember one where a man and his wife came rushing out and saying 'we've got lunch all ready for you', and we sort of scrunched into their tiny two up and two down, and they fed the whole lot of us - there was about fifteen of us.

Where did you stay at night?

Er, all kinds of places. We stayed, er, in an area where I think there was a school hall, we stayed at sports areas, we camped out all kinds of places - it was just a motley array of things. We joined up with Miner's Wives groups, um I think - was it in Leeds or Sheffield? I can't remember, but we got to one of them, and we were invited to go to the town hall for a reception - they were holding a reception, so we, you know from all these different things.....

What was your reception, generally - any adverse reactions?

No, no, I mean the villages we were walking through were lots of working class people who were very very supportive, and who welcomed us with open arms. And as I said, people opened their doors - they'd say 'we heard you were coming', and you

know, just ordinary people would just invite us into their homes, or give us food, or say 'we've made sandwiches for you'. Or you know, and they'd just turn up, and it was fantastic. I think we quit just before the end, and left them to go ahead, and we went back to Greenham.

To Greenham?

Yeah, that's when I stayed full time.

And which gate were you staying at?

Well I went - I used to go down to Indigo, but Indigo was just on a stretch of road, and there was nowhere on the other side of the road where you could be. So literally you'd have a pallet and somewhere to stay, but it was very very exposed, and a very narrow strip of grass that it was on. And gradually I worked my way down to the next one along, which was Violet Gate. So Violet Gate, it was known as the Violet Gate Slope, so you slid your way down it sometimes, but um, you would be sitting there, around the fire pit, and you could duck across the road and go up between the, there was a little path that lead up to a little bit of clearing with trees and bushes, and on the other side of that was the golf course, so it was a nice stretch of green where you could build benders and things like that. It was a gate, so there were gates there, but they never opened them, so you could park your vehicles up quite easily.

Any interaction with the golfers?

Um, I think they were just kind of like disdainful, but tried to ignore it and pretend it wasn't happening, so yeah. But not really any interaction with the golfers, no.

What was special about Violet Gate for you? What was different about it compared to the other gates?

Well, if you had to explain to a visitor, and you were saying what each of the gates were like, it would be kind of, well Yellow Gate was the activist gate and the political gate, because that's where all the cameras went, and the other people - like if visitors came up, I mean it did wind me up terribly one time. I went to stay at Red Gate one time, and um, a lot of people had gone off for various things, I think there were only two of us that were there, and when we woke up at like half five or six in the morning, the police had arrived with the bailiffs and the munchers ready to tear down everything. And a woman in a very, it must have been quite an expensive sports car rolled up, and she said 'oh, I'm looking for the Greenham women, and you know, I want to know if they need any help?' And I said 'well, as you can see, we're getting evicted, and there's only two of us, so we can't rescue everyone's things, and if you

can help that would be wonderful', and she kind of looked us up and down, and she said 'no, actually I was wanting to go and speak to the real Greenham women', I said 'well you want Yellow Gate then - you just keep on going, love', and off she went, roared away and left us to it. So it was just kind of like (takes big exasperated breath, laughs). But she wanted the place where all the campers were, because that's what she thought was the real camp. So occasionally we had that, so yeah - Yellow Gate was sort of the activist gate. Green Gate was the ecologically sound gate - I did know somebody who was there for quite a long time, and um, she needed a holiday - she needed a break - every now and then people just needed a break, and so she went to Green Gate for two weeks for her holidays. Because we didn't have men at Green Gate, and it was off the road - it was up a different track, and they were very into ecology and having all the right recycling bags, and all the rest of it, so she went and had her holiday for two weeks at Green Gate. Um, so, then there was, um, Blue Gate, which was kind of the young anarchists' gate - punk, and the joke was if you sat down there for more than 20 minutes, they'd Mohican your hair, or dye it blue. Then there was Indigo, which was again - it was all a precarious kind of gate, um, but it was quite a likely one where they might bring convoys out. And then there was Violet Gate, and actually I should - because the Violet one was the one I was that. And there was Orange Gate, and Orange Gate was the creative gate - it was where people, they had a very nice flat area, and they could do canopies over it, so they used to sometimes they would drive round in a van, and all of a sudden they'd leap out and perform some kind of skit or songs or something to entertain you, and then they'd all pile back in and drive off, so they were the entertainment gate. And they used to - people used to play musical instruments, and people would gravitate there - sort of arty. Red Gate sprang up just as an annex because it got really busy, and sometimes you'd get other little gates - Turquoise Gate, I think it was a vegan gate at one point, and then somebody thought of a fruitarian gate, but I never got to that one! (Laughs). But Violet Gate became known as, and visitors said to me - when I took them on this um, er, to do a water run, and they said 'What about Violet Gate though, because that's where you live?' And I said 'Um, I think that's the gate where we just eat all the time!' And we weren't particularly - there wasn't any prescription on if you were lesbian, there were a lot of people there that were straight, we ate meat, we had fish for Christmas dinner one time, so we were - one of our women ended up writing to a squaddie from behind the fence for quite a long time.

That's interesting - how did that come about? Do you know?

She just talked to him (laughs)!

Did you talk much to people behind the dance?

Yeah, quite a lot. Sometimes they'd be hostile and quite horrible, and sometimes they'd be...

These are the police?

Well no, they were always the British - they were the British troops on the...

Inside the perimeter?

On the inside of the perimeter, and you never saw the Americans, because they kept separate from that. Occasionally there would be one of the um, Americans would drive up, and sit and get out, and talk, and the British squaddies were like 'okay mate, you've been here 20 minutes, if you're here any longer were going to have to report you', and we'd always say 'go now, because we don't want you to get into trouble and stuff like that'.

So there'd be an American GI who'd stop and talk?

Yeah, sure.

Can you remember any conversations?

Um, not particularly - but they were concerned about the nuclear, about the whole nuclear idea. Um, I mean I remember seeing threads televised, and the possibility of a nuclear issue got worse and worse, and in the end I thought you know, I'm not prepared to just sit at home and wait for something to happen, so that was part of the motivation for going to Greenham. I thought at-least if I'm there, then I'm - whatever I'm saying I don't agree with this, and I don't think it should be happening.

Did you feel very afraid that...

I think we were all quite - and if you ever saw the convoys going out, it's the thought of those things being deployed in the British countryside that really...and when you saw them come out, um, and they would - you know, the police or whatever would pen you in, and try to stop you getting the word out - because people would jump in cars and follow it so they would see that they couldn't deploy them without people getting the word out in the British countryside, that they didn't have license to just do as they pleased with these weapons of mass destruction, so yeah, I think it was - I think it was very very real at that time, and we - personally, I felt a very sense of strong - I might be blown up by a nuclear missile - I might as well be right outside the darn base if that's going to happen, and I might as well be telling people I don't agree with it. So, and there was an awful lot of support for that. You know. When the

evictions started - I remember after the first big eviction happened, um, and I went down and I wasn't sure if the camp was, of-course it was still there! It was like don't be so silly, of-course it's still going to be there, but they had taken away a lot of equipment the women had been using, and the benders and things, um and at those days um, obviously you were sleeping outside, and before you could come up with anything else to cover you or to sleep in, um people say 'oh we should get Gore-Tex bags', because you can get orange plastic bags, um, and put your sleeping bag - but the condensation is terrible, and you end up wringing wet, so the Gore-Tex bags are breathable, and people say 'oh you know, we tried to get Gore-Tex bags, but we couldn't get them anywhere, we were trying in London and all the shops were saying they were sold out'. I can remember a guy coming down and he opened the boot of his car and he said 'how many of you are staying here, how many of you need Gore-Texs?' And we were all like putting our hands up, and he was literally handing them out like packets of crisps, and in those days they were really expensive, and he must have gone out and bought up everything he had. The incredible generosity of people who would just turn up, and you know you might never seem them again.

What sort of things did they bring apart from Gore-Tex?

Oh my goodness. People...

Food, presumably? Wine?

After the evictions, and when it was - then they got the bailiffs coming in, so they were the bin men, really. Um, and sometimes they'd have a police escort. And yeah sometimes they could be quite nasty, and a couple of them got a bit of a reputation for that. But at one point you know they had Youth Opportunity bailiffs - so these sixteen and seventeen year olds! (Laughs). So they had YOPs bailiffs - so it was quite funny, actually.

The mind boggles.

Yeah, so the first time they had these the YOPs kids turned up, and we had a bit of fun with them, so I was following one around, I was saying 'perhaps you need to pick that up', because they were saying 'well, what do I do now?' And we'd say 'just take that up, and you know, go and put it in the mud sheet, you'll be alright', and they were going off and doing it - we were telling them what to do! It was really hysterical, because they didn't realise, and the actual bailiffs were getting quite aeriaded about it, because we were treating them like family.

And they'd have been local kids, wouldn't they?

Yeah, probably, so it was quite funny. Sometimes you could - they could be a sty, and sometimes they could be quite alright. And I remember one time they turned up quite early in the morning and they said 'right, well we'll take your van', and I said 'do you know what?' They said 'are you the driver?' I said 'yeah, I'm the driver', and they said 'well you better drive it away now because otherwise we're going to have to impound it.' And I smelt a rat because I thought you don't want to impound it, you probably want to go home and get your tea or something, so I said 'do you know what, I've had it with these women here, they just expect me to do everything for them, and they're just taking me for granted - you take the van.' 'Go on, you take it, I think it'll serve them right', and he was going 'oh come on, you can't mean that, they're your friends!'. (Laughs). And in the end he was begging me to drive the van away - it was really funny!

Reverse psychology?

It was just fun, do you know what I mean, but we yeah, so um, there was that. But my best time - I was taking driving lessons while I was down there with another woman, and we had this lovely guy - he was an older guy from Thatcham, and he was really retired, but that was his contribution to the effort. And he was giving driving lessons. And we were driving one day, and we were going along, and I went 'oh my god, look there's a muncher at Blue Gate', and he said (affects slightly posh voice) 'oh, sorry are we supposed to doing something?' I said 'yes, we need to turn around and go back and warn the other gates because everybody is asleep', and he went 'okay, okay Jade, if you could just take a right here', and so we turned around and drove back and he stopped opposite the Violet Gate, and he went 'what do we do now?' And I went 'just roll the window down and shout 'munchers at Blue Gate', and he went 'oh, okay then (clears throat), munchers at Blue Gate!' (Laughs), and he rolled it down and says 'do we go to another one now?' I said yeah, 'we'll go to Orange Gate'.

Learning to drive round...that's brilliant!

Yeah! It was so funny, and was so sweet - he was a lovely lovely guy. But you either had people who were all on your side, or people that were very much against you.

The people that came to visit you, um, and the other gates - were they generally individuals, or were they part of organised groups like, I don't know - church groups?

Well, I mean we did have one time when it was pouring with rain and nobody felt like getting out of the van at all, because it was just mud everywhere, and somebody knocked on the van, and we reluctantly opened the door, and they said 'oh we've got these women here from Bulgaria, and they want to talk to you.' And we said 'you know, it's not a good day - take them round to Orange Gate, because they've got

tarpaulins and they can sit out there and it'll be warm, because they've got a fire - we haven't even got a fire going.' So they went off, and Elizabeth Abrahams, who was one of the women at Violet Gate, she said 'oh I'm going to go off - because she had her own car, and she said 'I'm going to go off and see about this'. Anyway, she came back about 3 hours later and we said 'oh, how was it Elizabeth?' And she went 'oh, they're amazing - these women came across and they've given', and she was twirling something in her hand, and I said 'what's that?' And she said 'oh, it's a medal - it's the highest honour you can give to a woman in Bulgaria, and they were handing them out to Orange Gate', and she was whizzing it round on her thing, and it was like okay, well we missed that one, but never mind.

Did you have much connection with overseas women - either visiting, or did you ever get uncles with any groups and go off?

Yeah, so um, I mean I did quite a bit of work in other countries, actually. So it might be doing something like - I did a self defense workshop at um, Newcastle University, because they asked for some women and said 'does anyone want to go?' And I said 'oh, I'll go and do it, because I've done some non-violent direct action stuff'. And then we were invited to go over to Hamburg for the Hamburg Women's Festival, and we showed the film Carry Greenham Home.

Again this is mid 1980s, isn't it?

Yeah, yeah yeah yeah. So we did that, and they were taken about - when they saw pictures on the screen of the police marching towards the women because um they said in Hamburg, or in Germany it was far more brutal, and you know they thought we were going to get a real bad beating, and we said 'well our police just tend to want to try to move us from one place another, and then somebody else lies down, so it's kind of like a thankless task'. But um, so we did some of that networking, and I also went out to Vancouver, and in Vancouver we went out to Vancouver Island - we did a radio show, um.

What group was that with? Who organised it at that end?

Do you know I can't honestly - they were running a peace camp on Vancouver Island, and it was against the uranium mining.

Ah right.

But they had proper teepees - the real McCoy teepees, so it was very exciting to go and sleep in them. But they had funny kind of rules because they had rules like, oh you have to tick when you've done your rota of washing up - things like that.

Gosh, not very British!

(Laughs). Yeah - nothing like the way we operated at all. But it was really interesting. We asked about possibly going on a, there was a camp where they were actually doing the uranium mining further up in the north of Canada, and we expressed an interest, but when we realised that you have to take your own water and food and everything, and you're probably going to be at-least three days away from anywhere that's got a post office, or anything like that, you have to be completely self sufficient and know what you're doing. We didn't have that expertise, so we ended up - we didn't go. We stayed on a Women's Herb Farm on Vancouver Island, and we met lots of other women's groups that were on the island, so that was really interesting.

Sounds great, how long were you there for? Two weeks?

Oh longer than that - couple of months maybe.

Oh, months?

Yeah, so we spent quite a bit of time out there.

Did Greenham common fund any of this? Because I know there was a pot of money that people would...

Well people would send donations, and then um, you'd - they would have money meetings, and everyone could go and input their two cents - 'well, people want a group to go over there, if anybody's interested in going'. So it was open - anybody could pitch in and go and whatever they wanted to do. And so if you were there at the time and you said 'oh yeah, I'd be interested in that', because I'm also Canadian - that's one of the reasons why I wanted to go and get involved, so um, I'm a dual-national, so yeah. You would just get involved in that. I think I was a signatory at one point as well, but that wasn't a job that I wanted to hold for very long - I only did it because there wasn't anybody else available at the time, and I got out of it as soon as I could, because I didn't really want to be doing that - you know.

It's quite a responsibility to do that for a long time.

Yeah, yeah. So I didn't particularly want to be involved in that.

Any other foreign trips that you did?

I can't think of any. I mean we travelled to different places in different towns.

You didn't go to Russia, did you?

No. Elizabeth did - bless her. Elizabeth Abrahams. The other thing that we did, I will just tell you, because this also involved Elizabeth, so um, and I was with her at the time. A lot of us went up to the Barrow demonstration - where they were demonstrating against the biggest ship yard, and building of nuclear subs. So we went up there, and because my mother had lived up there (laughs), so I went up as well, and I said 'you won't like it very much', and they said 'oh no, it's on the coast', and I said 'um hum, okay if that's what you want to think'. And I met Annie later on, and she said 'you know what you said about - you were right, it's a real dump!'. So yeah, because my mother had lived there and I knew. So anyway, we went up there and there as kind of quite a straggly bunch of us, and some of us had kids and things, and Elizabeth Abrahams were there, and her family - at one point - had owned Swarthmore Hall, which was the birth place of the Quaker movement. And I'd remembered visiting this place as a child, so I knew the things, so we went along to that and there was a Quaker couple who were custodians of the place at the time, and they invited us all to stay there. They wouldn't hear of us going and camping out somewhere 'you must stay with us', and they fed us, they gave us breakfast in the morning, and it was just lovely. And the Quakers actually - especially in Newbury were amazing, amazing people, because I don't know if anybody else has told you - but they had a separate um, they had their own meeting house, but they cordoned off a part of it, and built an area with um, um, to sit with washing machines and things - so people could go and have a shower, and wash their clothes and do all that. They were incredibly supportive - they didn't always agree with everything we did, but they were incredibly, incredibly supportive, and of-course they're against weapons, so um they were a godsend because that was great - you had somewhere to go and do your clothes. Although there were other people in Newbury who also opened up their houses, and you could go and have a bath there, or do your clothes, or go to the launderette or whatever.

Was it sort of 50/50 support and anti-Greenham...what was the feeling you were left with?

Yeah, I mean the, some places, I mean there as a cafe where a lot of the women went - if you went into Newbury and you were signing on, and you would go there for something to eat, you know, and have a cup of tea. And some placed would refuse to serve you, so it was like either they loved you, or they liked you, or they didn't mind because you were bringing money in, and there was one pub called The Ruckabee, and that is where people used to go on a Friday night! And they had a no dancing rule, but boy we'd all sit there and have a good time, and it was great, so yeah.

So it was mixed?

It was mixed, but I kind of, I kind of, um, I was used to having abusive from - especially from the local youth, because that's how they you know - that's how youth are, and I kind of got so immune to it that I didn't, I was with somebody who hadn't been at camp very long - I think she'd only been down for a weekend, and we were walking along the road, and we turned - we passed some Newbury youth and um, I turned around to find this girl, young woman - not girl, young woman, and she was in tears. And I said 'what's the matter?', she said 'they spat at you'. I said 'oh yeah, they kind of do that all the time', and she said 'I can't see how you can bear it, and I thought I should really challenge it, I know, but I can't be bothered. I'm not going to educate them because they're - they were too much into doing their own thing. But we did have some trouble with Newbury youth from time to time, and there was people who would drive up in cars, and there was the some talk of fire bombing and things like that - throwing things.

Newbury youth being male, female, mixed?

Male. Pretty much young males. But to be honest, to be fair we didn't even know if they were from Newbury, it's just that's what you called them, because it was just 'oh yeah, the Newbury youth came round and threw rocks at the truck', or something. So, but you know...

Why do you think they were so horrible?

Probably because they heard their parents saying 'it's disgusting, it's a disgrace, it shouldn't be allowed', and that they thought - how does any hate thing start? I'm sure the Nazis started that way. But I'm not saying they were like that, I think they just thought it was a bit of a joke, they had a bit of a license, and no-one would care if they did stuff like that.

Friday night a market town?

Yeah, yeah..

Drunk and...

Sure. Yeah, you know. But as far as I'm aware I don't think anything specifically bad happened, at-least not when I was there anyway.

What was the maximum number at Violet Gate?

Oh that was hard to tell.

Roughly?

Well I kind of gave a list of about ten or fifteen names.

So not many women there. Did you ever feel vulnerable at all?

Occasionally you did. Yeah, I think Jane was there one night, and she was sleeping in the back of the van, and when we - I think we'd been out somewhere, and when we got back she said 'oh god, you know while you were away some of the Newbury youth came by.' Again, I'm not trying to malign the, because we don't know they were actually from Newbury, but that was the supposition. Um, and I said, we said 'what happened, what happened?' And she said 'they opened up the van and they saw me there, and of-course I woke up when they came. They were just talking to me for a very long time.' She said 'I was a bit twitchy because I didn't know what they were going to do, but in the end they got back in their car and went off'. She said 'I just talked to them', and usually you can talk your way out of things - calm it down, and that was true of a lot of things, like the non-violent direct action things. I remember a woman called Meryl, and the police came along and they were trying to hang onto us, and I think they had Meryl by the wrists or something, and she was going (sings) 'shall we dance?', and she started waltzing this guy around, and he was in hysterics, he just couldn't keep a straight face at all. And so you diffused it - either by treating them as real people, as opposed to something that was being officious and nasty, and generally they responded. You did get a couple of people who were just mean tempered, or maybe they'd had a bad day, but that's true of anything. But mostly people you know, even on the other side were perfectly reasonable.

What actions did you do? What sort of things did you do on your actions,

Oh, well for example when we went up for the Barrow in Furness thing, one thing we did was we went to um, Winscale - now Sellafields, or whatever, and Rebecca Johnson was there for one of those ones. And one of the women said 'oh look, it's only a fence, you can make a nice little hole and just go under!' So a whole bunch of us slipped through, we just went through, and by the time they'd cottoned on that there was a whole bunch of us in there - I mean we wee just singing and you know, and then they just escorted us out of the gates.

No arrests or anything?

No, no, I mean they wouldn't have wanted the publicity. When they had the control tower action that was Rebecca...

At Greenham?

Yeah. And Jill, and I can't remember - there was another woman and I can't remember her name, um and one of the things they did - they'd graffiti, they'd write their names on stuff because otherwise you see they'd claim it had never happened, and they'd been no breach, and all the rest of it, so they wrote their names on stuff, so they ended up going for trial about a year later, and it was at Reading Crown Court. So a bunch of us went, um, obviously to sit through trial. And Rebecca being Rebecca, she was very vocal and very articulate, and she would say all these things. Anyway at one point when they told her to be quiet, I think she burst into song, and she just carried on. And they said if she wouldn't agree to be bound over by the police, they were going to take her down to the cells and she would have to stay there, otherwise she'd be - they would send her to prison. And so what she did was she kept on singing, so they took her away - so Jill started singing as well. And Jill was a young American, and she was due to go back - and her parents were there for the trial, as well. And she was due to go back and start university, and obviously if she was going to be banged up, then she wouldn't be able to start. So we were quite despondent, because she was taken down to the cells as well, and we thought 'oh, okay, so they're both going to be in prison'. And obviously we had Jill's parents with us as well, so we went back to the house where we were staying in Reading, and I think we'd gone for something to eat or something, and then we went back to the house, and when we got back there was Jill sitting there. We said 'Jill! What...?', she said 'oh, I agreed to be bound over, do you know Rebecca didn't stop singing the whole time, and I couldn't take it any more, so I said I'd be bound over, so I'll be heading back to America to start my degree course.' So it was just funny, but I mean Rebecca could sing for England, and she knew all the words (laughs)! So yeah, it was quite - but again it's just human, you could just as easily turn around and say something else, or do something else.

Were you arrested?

No, I was - I was picked up inside the gate one time with other people who had been inside the base, and I remembered thinking 'well if they can do it', and I started singing, and in the end they went 'shall we just let this lot out at the next gate?' And the other guy said 'please, I can't take much more of this', and I thought there you go - it worked, perfect (laughs)! So I didn't have to protest or do anything.

So no arrests for you?

No, I never got arrested, no.

But you went and supported and ...

Oh yeah. And there was lots of things that went on in Newbury Crown Court, New Court - not Crown Court, because it was Reading Crown Court. But in the Newbury Court we'd go down there quite often, and I think the thing was that we'd go in to support women who'd done a variety of things, and I can remember one woman, um, and this guy had arrested her, and he'd said that she'd cut the fence. I remember this one really well, um, and they said 'oh and you saw her cutting...', and she did her own cross examinations, so she said 'oh and you saw me cutting fence, what with?' And he said 'bolt cutters, these bolt cutters - big things', and she went 'okay, so you're' - I don't know if you remember To Kill A Mockingbird and the trial? And she said 'that's really interesting that you saw me doing that, because I haven't been able to use this hand since I was a child because it's partly paralysed'. And the guy's face was purple, and the magistrate was like 'er, what would you like...', and through gritted teeth he said 'I must have been mistaken...gggrrr'.

I think that was Ann Pettitt.

Might well have been.

Because she lost part of her hand in a traffic accident when she was 17 or 18, and she was arrested, I think that must have been her.

I think that might have been that. But it was so uniquely done. She could not have done a bolt cutter.

And did the women always use their real names?

Oh god no, no no no (laughs)! Um, I think when they had the big surround the base thing, and the idea was as many women as possible would get arrested - so the whole point was either not to give your name, or to give a false name. So they were trying to get people arrested so they would fill up all the jails, and then they would create a big stir, because obviously they couldn't arrest all the ordinary criminals - our women were considered more like political prisoners because of their beliefs, and so sometimes you'd hear names in court 'is there a Barbie Wire here?' Or 'a Freida People?' (Laughs), so there were those kinds of things, but when they were trying to do some arrests and they got some women stood in a row, and of-course everyone was wearing different clothing, and the guy would turn around and go and look somewhere, and they'd all swap places! And he'd go 'where's that woman I was just talking to?' And he literally couldn't tell one from the other - probably we all kind of looked the same. And another woman, a similar thing happened, and she had one of these reversible coats on - blue on one side and red on the other - so just took her

coat off and put it on again, and when the guy turned round he said 'where's that woman I was talking to a minute ago?' 'I don't know, haven't seen her, she must have gone off there somewhere!'. Just looked at him, and 'oh, I'll see if I can find her', and off he went, so do you know what I mean - people were very...but yeah! I think the problem was sometimes a lot of women came down, and they didn't really have the expertise on the bid demonstrations, and a lot of us tried to walk round, and sometimes you got a situation either where they brought horses in and people got quite scared and panicked, or they didn't really know how to deal with a situation so that it didn't escalate into something that was distressing and possibly violent. And I can remember going round one time and some women had cut a - I can't remember if they'd cut a hole, or cut some fence and managed to push it down, and er, a couple of the women had got on the other side, and one young copper had grabbed hold of this woman, and arrested her, and everybody on the other side - on our side of the fence was getting very, very um, it was getting a bit rough, so I went 'okay, okay he's arrested her now anyway, so let's calm down', and I said to him 'look, we can sort this out - we get that you've arrested her, that's fine, yeah, but you know - she's here with her friends, so they don't know where you're taking her, and so I said who is with this woman?' So somebody piped up and said 'there's about six of us', so she drove us down - 'there's a van, but she's got the keys', so I said 'how about you let her give the keys back, and then you can just carry on? And where are you taking her?' And he said 'Yellow Gate, there'll be the main...' so I said 'so they can get the van and they can meet her there in what 2 or 3 hours, is that the fair thing?' And he went 'yeah, that's fine' and they all calmed down, and it all went back. But people didn't understand.

You had the experience?

Yeah, but not everybody - when people came down, I think some of the women that lived there felt - not negative about it, because obviously it was amazing, but worried that a lot of them came down and didn't know how to deal with stuff, so we worried about, and it did mean some people got a bit worried or distressed because they'd never seen like convoys go out, or sort of - you know, people getting quite aggressive on the other side. And the poor young copper was like 'god I wish I hadn't...' because there's this mob of women, um, and her was - you have to realise that they were scared too a lot of the time. And that time in Winscale and we were looking round, and Rebecca was singing one of her songs, and I could see a couple of the young coppers that were stood there, and one was definitely had tears in his eyes, and the other was going - you know, you could tell they understood why we were doing it, and they weren't aggressive or you know, they had to do their jobs, and we totally got that - and they weren't allowed to voice it, but you could tell they were sympathetic.

Some would have been very young.

Yes.

19 - I mean teenagers, really.

Yeah. And they didn't know how to handle great mobs of people - you wouldn't, so people tried to be considerate - that's why we sort of taught, tried to teach non violent direct action - make it a game, or make it fun, or talk to them, or say something - you know, try to diffuse it, it's not, it's non-violent, so we want to diffuse things as opposed to ramping up the tension, because that helps nobody.

Did you follow any of the convoys out? Or go to Salisbury Plain?

Yeah, I can remember again jumping into the car with, um, um, Elizabeth and we chased...we chased...there was one lot of convoy come out where they penned us in. It tended to be more at Blue Gate, but I think I was there one time when they brought some of the things out, and they do look just like - and again there a lot of the police looked quite like distressed and upset, because they didn't know, and we didn't know if this was the real thing - we didn't know if this was going to be them firing things off, and you never knew. And they would corral you, because they were trying to stop you getting to phone trees - because we had the phone tree, and they would alert people to send out convoys to either stop them or identify them and let people know they were going out. So when we went out - again with Elizabeth, and we were sort of chasing the convoys and of-course they'd split up and go in different directions, but yeah. Yeah, um, so sometimes you'd chase them. But I can remember that time they sort of penned us in, and some - two or three got away, and (laughs) I didn't think how that might end - lay down in front of it, and got dragged away, but at the time I was thinking 'okay, I didn't really think about what if it ran over me, but never mind!' (Laughs). But yeah, so um, people obviously did that.

And did you have meetings before you took any actions - informal or formal depending on what it was?

I'm sure some things were organised, but mostly it was people doing - one or two or three people, I mean this was always the beauty of it - it's like you know, they always thought there must be this huge organisation going on, and actually it was individuals going 'do you know what, let's cut down a bit of fence and go in tonight' you know. And I think for the Ten Thousand Women Come for Ten Days - or whatever it was, can't remember exactly now, and I remember that there was - I think a plane came over of rather um, quite a lot of elderly women who came over - I think it was New Zealand or Australia - I can't remember now, and they came down and they were desperate, they wanted to go inside the base, and finally they said 'can somebody

help us, because we want to go in and make our point, and we've come all this way'. So somebody said 'oh yeah alright, I'll help you', so I think they cut down - because you had to cut down the fence and lay it over the bare bed wire so people could get in with their walking sticks and their zimmer frames. And so they went in, and I didn't go in for that part, but the story that was told was that they were going down the runway, and there was a speeding car coming up and they thought, 'oh we'll all get arrested, so we'll all sit down in a circle and be arrested holding hands', so they all managed to get down and were holding hands, and the car went straight past, so they all had to get back up again, which was probably quite difficult - you know!

So it was non-hierarchical?

Oh god, totally. Yeah, I mean I think Rowan...

Anarchical?

Yes. I think I remember Rowan went out - I think she went to the Breaking the Sound Barrier action in Australia, and she networked out there. She went to the Breaking the Sound thing, and there was this big debate 'is cutting the wire violence?' And they did everything by consensus, so everybody got in little groups, and they went off and then, you know, they all debated it, and if one group came back and said 'no, we still think it's violence', and then they went back. After about four days of this, so I think there was a couple of Greenham women, and I don't know if Rowan was one of those, but apparently somebody from the back went 'what if somebody had already done it?' (Laughs!). They'd already cut the fence, and they were like (snorts), subverted the consensus things, but you could run round. I mean it was a great idea but sometimes you...yeah, so pretty much it was the big demonstrations were pretty much organised by groups.

Groups within Greenham?

Not necessarily. Groups outside.

Who would be...

There was, well, I don't know that - night watchers did literally come and do the nights so you could sleep, but there were obviously peace groups dotted around - in Reading and all sorts of places, who you know were activists and wanting to do different things and come down. And they might liaise - they might say to a group 'oh you know, where's a good place to go', or whatever, or 'where do you think they've got the least amount of people around, but they'd probably go off and do something on their own. I mean after the evictions, you know, we actually had our own meals-on-

wheels, so those people would come down, um, and they'd come down with a van, and it'd be a different group every night for the first, I can't remember - couple of months, maybe. And they were absolutely amazing, they would go, right 'we've got meat here, we've got vegan here, we've got vegetarian here, we've got this organic wine to go with that, and we've got this, and this is for pudding,' and they would literally come round and drive round to every single gate, and hand out food. And they were just amazing, because when the first shelters were ripped down, and the bailiffs were very, very active - they would come round and get a hose and they'd spread the hose in the fire, and you'd go 'well, there you go - did that make you happy? Because you now, we'll light it again in a couple of hours. so long as you're feeling alright about it?' And then they'd go off, and it was difficult to cook or do things, so the meals-on-wheels people - it was all done by separate groups - they'd all agree a day to go around and they would cook for that night, and they'd come down.

And they'd be part of big actions as well?

I don't honestly know.

I was thinking whether outside peace groups were you know - they were organising on the big actions.

I presume so. I wasn't affiliated to any of them, so I don't know - I was just living there.

Did your own..?

Yeah. So it was very much an individual thing, which was, I suppose a weakness, but both your strength because there was no KGB assisted plans to go in and do something - you just sort of talked around the fire and said 'shall we go in the base tonight?' Or 'shall we go and do this tonight?' 'Oh yeah, alright then'.

Do you think there was any infiltration of Greenham? I've heard all sorts of suppositions.

I have no idea. I have no idea. I know, it's quite funny because Elizabeth went on the Russia trip, I didn't go on that one - I went to Canada, so other people have got to have a go sometimes going on - to places. I thought it sounded really interesting. I think they met lots of dissidents over there, and they met one family, um, and um one woman in particular who was married, and not long after they came back, I believe the woman's husband was arrested, so Elizabeth along with some other people decided to go and protest at the Russian embassy, so they went up to the Russian embassy, and Elizabeth said 'we demand to see the Russian..' you know, the Russian

whatever - ambassador, and they said 'you have to be related to somebody', and she said 'well I am...' whatever her name is, 'I am her sister', and they said 'well we don't think you are madam', and she went 'we are all sisters under the skin', and the guy was obviously very clever and he went 'is Margaret Thatcher your sister?' And she went 'we all have to draw the line somewhere!' (Laughs). So do you know what I mean? So Elizabeth never let a little thing like that stop her. And I can remember one time, because she'd obviously gone in the base - she'd gone in with other people, I don't even know who they were, and Dr Katarina, who was Australian and living at the camp...

Is that Katrina Howes?

No. This is Dr Katrina - she was Australian, and we were all sat around and this chap came up and he was obviously quite senior, and he went (clears throat) 'is Dr...' he was on the other side of the fence 'is Dr Katrina here, please?' And Katrina (adopts Australian accent) 'oh yeah, mate, I'm Katrina, what do you want?' And he went 'oh, Miss Abrahams has requested could you go and collect her from Yellow Gate, she'll be released in about 25 minutes.' And we were just in hysterics, because she'd obviously told him he had to go and arrange her transport! (Laughs). She actually had that - because she was so proper - that people would just give in and do stuff.

Do what she asked?

Yeah. So it was quite hysterical really.

While this was all going on, what did you family and friends think of you?

Well all the women that I knew - in Tamworth, they were all really supportive. I did worry about telling my mum when...

I wanted to ask about your mum.

Yes, well I had a friend called Bren, and when, and I said I'm really worried about telling my mum I'm going to do this, and she went 'oh don't worry - take her down the pub, it's alright, you go off and play darts, I'll have a chat with your mum', and I kept looking over, I was quite worried and I thought oh, you know. I can't remember what she said - when I first said something to her, she went 'you can't do that, you're ruining my life', and I thought 'what?'. Anyway, so down the pub - Bren, my mum - chatting in a corner er, and I kept looking over thinking 'she looks quite cheerful, that's a bit weird, okay, how's that doing?' And in the end I went over, and my mum was all 'oh, that's alright then, so you'll be going next month, that's alright.' And I said to Bren 'what did you say to her?' And she said 'I just asked her if she wanted you to

be happy or not, and that's what you wanted to do'. So she was fine. And people were very supportive. My friend Maria - she's in Brighton, I think she's already been interviewed, um, at the time she was living in London, and when I gave up my place - my home, in Tamworth, and I left, um, she gave me a set of her keys, and said 'whenever you want a break or a rest, my house is your house, you can come up to my flat whenever you want'. And other women from the camp did go as well. I don't know if you've come across Bat?

No.

Bat Dimion - she was um, quite involved, she's done an awful lot since then as well. I mean I met Rebecca Johnson, um, I think at some do or other, and she could always one-up you! (Laughs). Which was, all kudos to her. She said 'what are you doing?' I said 'I've been training to become a medical herbalist', and she went 'oh', and I said 'what are you doing then?' And she went 'oh, I'm working for the United Nations about how you diffuse, how you get more support for diffusing land mines', and I thought of-course you are, of-course that's what you're doing - why would I think any different. So that's what she was doing. It's just funny what people moved on to when they finished at camp.

What do you think the impact was on the women's physical and mental health if they were there for a long time at Greenham? If there was any impact?

I don't know. It was a very odd existence, because you didn't have any bills to pay, um you didn't have gas or electricity or anything like that - it was more about, people either - when they left, they either went and lived in a city because they could network with lots of people - which is what I did, or they'd move out to remote areas like they'd go and live on Women's Land in Wales, or they'd go to a remote Scottish Highland area. Things like that. So they either shunned city life, or they went and immersed themselves where there was lots of political activity - like I came here and you know, there was things like demonstrations about freeing Nelson Mandela and I got involved in those kinds of things, and my social life was going on a demonstration, really. Because I met everybody I knew, but I was equally supporting those causes - I'm not saying I just went for the socialising. But you knew people who were also doing it, and that's where they would be, and you would see them.

Did anyone get burnt out, a bit? Long long stays - difficult life?

Oh yeah, there was times when you absolutely hated the place with a passion because it was just so frustrating. I mean people said when it snowed and when it was cold, you know I can remember having a plastic bender - a washing line bender - which is a string between two trees and a bit of plastic, and you'd tuck it under and

put rocks on it, and you'd tie the inside with clothes pegs and things - very inventive. And I loved it - I loved waking up in the morning and a walking out in the snow and things like that. It was gorgeous, and I really took to it - I loved it. But there were times like the eviction with the woman who was being a real pain in the neck. And I can remember driving the car out with the things we'd managed to save, um, and then, er when I looked behind there was the entire - there was the police cars, there was the muncher vans following me, and I pulled off the road and I sort of turned round, and I sat there - when they came back again, obviously having done the next gate, done that one, and I sat there with my feet up on the dashboard and just waved at them, because I didn't want them to know was actually I'd run out of petrol, and if they came and did anything, I'd have to let them take the car because I couldn't move it - but they didn't know that, so I just put my feet up on the dashboard and waved at them, and they just thought I was going '(makes noise)'. I think I sat there for like 3 hours before somebody thought 'where's the car, and where's Jade got to?' Sent somebody out to go look, and it was that point I was, and people had lost stuff because that woman was so snotty and she wouldn't help, and there was times when you just thought 'eeeurghgh, I just can't bear it' because people were not helpful at that point.

Was there any tension between the gates at all?

Not that I know of. Not unless you didn't want your hair doing in a Mohican or something, no. Not really, no.

The reason I ask was Yellow Gate, and there were, there was that split around - well supposed racism, I don't know whether it happened or not.

Yeah, but that, I had nothing to do with that.

You weren't involved?

You know, everybody had their own little circle that they went to where they knew people, and sometimes you'd come back and you wouldn't know anybody who was sitting there, do you know what I mean?

Oh right.

And you'd go 'oh well, there you'd go', and you'd sit there and eventually someone you knew would turn up, or not, or whatever. But you used to get people coming down completely randomly - you get somebody coming down in a very nice looking car, and they'd get out with their heels and they'd go 'my husband doesn't know I've come down here today', and I'm going 'you might not want to sit too near the smoke,

because you'll smell of smoke, and that'll be a dead give away - do you know what I mean?' And they'd come down and just talk to you, or you'd get people from Bulgaria turning up with medals, do you know what I mean - it was just, or you'd get a reporter, and you'd be washing the cups up and this reporter would 'because um, um, the convoy went out last night, and you need to talk to me', and I'd go 'I'm washing up at the moment', and they went 'you don't understand, this is for your benefit - you have to talk to us,' and I'd go 'and where you yesterday? And where were you the day before that, and where are you going to be tomorrow? You know, my need to do things is not your need..'. 'You want to get this message'. I said 'why, why do I want to get this message? People are coming anyway, people talk to me anyway, I don't need you', 'you need us, you need us', 'no - what I need to do is do the washing up - go somewhere else, maybe you'll find somebody else who actually wants to talk to you'.

How do you think the media represented women, Greenham women?

Well the first time the convoy went out, I wasn't there, and it was women at Blue Gate, but what I do know is that they spoke to a woman reporter who had come down and spent quite a bit of time there, and they had grown to trust her, and when she turned up and said 'will you tell me what happened?' Um, they trusted her and they talked to her. And when they read the papers the next day - I read them too, and I can remember that one of the, the article in questions said something like 'and this woman admitted that they were all running around like headless chickens because they didn't know what to do, and they were panicked and flapping', which was complete - nobody ever said that, it never happened. Anyway this woman turned up again after a little bit, and they said 'the rubbish that you wrote which was nothing we said to you, and you're showing your face', and she said 'well it wasn't my choice, it was an editorial thing, um and I came down partly to tell you that that wasn't the real - that wasn't what I wrote, and I'm sorry it got printed like that'. But people learn to be very army of newspaper reporters, because they will lie in their teeth to get a story, or to make it sound better, but nobody ever said 'oh yes, we all felt like headless chickens' - it was completely invented, so there was obviously an element of distrust, and you bore that in mind when you talked to anybody. Um...

Within the media?

Yeah, you know - have you seen the Carry Greenham Home video?

Yeah.

Yeah, there's the thing where somebody is doing cartwheels, and this woman says 'can you stop, we're trying to do', and it's like yeah, well where were you yesterday?

It's that kind of thing, you know - we don't actually need you, we're onto going to pander to that. We're not media superstars and we don't want our minute of fame for the day - this is about a bigger issue. And when they were treated as if we weren't interested, the press kind of just went - this guy nearly imploded when I said 'I'd rather do the washing up than talk to you, to be honest. Maybe you can find somebody else who would like to talk to you, but I certainly can't be bothered'. And he was like 'oh my goodness, because I'm so important because I'm going to get your message out', and I was like 'I don't need you to get the message out'. People will - what I used to say was, and it was true because anybody who went there was a Greenham woman, and maybe they didn't live at the camp, but it didn't matter, because if they went away and talked to one other person, and spread the idea, other people would come, so it's kind of like 'if you build it, they will come' sort of thing. And that's how it always worked, and it worked better for being like that. It's funny because when you were sitting around the campfire, and people would come, and visitors would come, and they'd stay for a weekend and they might come down for a week, and they'd bring their kids or whatever, and sometimes the last thing we would talk about would be the nuclear missiles - we'd talk about everything: battered women's refuges, or all kinds of things to do with women's rights, or you know, um, working conditions - a million other things, you know, and not necessarily that at all. It was the biggest um, collective sort of exchange of information that I think has ever happened. Do you know what I mean? Because it was so complete - anybody could come down and have that conversation, and if you didn't have that conversation with one person because that wasn't their thing and they didn't want to talk to you, go and find somebody else who will talk to you, and there was plenty of people that would - do you know what I mean? So that was...

Interesting.

Yeah. And that was the hugest thing about it, and of-course the nuclear stuff as well, but that was a small part of it, and sometimes it wasn't the most important part at that time.

Do you talk to your daughter very much about Greenham days?

We went to see the um, there was an exhibition. I took her there after the camps had closed - I know the Yellow Gate thing was still going a little bit, but when she was a baby I drove there, I can't remember if the photos if I've got - but I've no idea where they are, and I had a picture of me taken back at where Violet Gate was - when she was a little toddler, so um, but um, yeah. We went to - there was, at the Imperial War Museum they had a Against the... No to War thing, and they had a whole, and we went to that - the two of us together.

How old was she then?

Oh she was, it was a couple - a year and a half ago or something, so we went to see that together and she was listening to some of the audio tape things with some of the women, and she was looking at the picture of the telephone tree and you know, all of those things. It was funny. It was funny because...

Was she impressed?

Yeah, I think so. And she went out in New York - 'Hands off our rights', and all the rest of it with some her friends, and did all of that, so, she's, she's not a big activist I would say, but she's certainly - they were talking about electing this woman senator who is now the head of education (snorts) in America, and they were - she sent me a photograph - they were all writing letters to try and block her, you know, because she was so awful. I mean she still go the post, but you know. But I was proud of Megan, because I think they've got different battles these days - climate change and all that. So I think there are different battles to be fought, I think. And some of them are still the same, the nuclear things are still there, but if we don't destroy the planet ourselves, the nuclear weapons will still sit there presumably. So, you know.

Do you fear climate change more than nuclear holocaust?

I just think it's different times, I mean.

All those nuclear weapons are still there in vast quantities.

Oh yeah.

And

(Inaudible) and Trump are still playing their pat-a-cake thing, sort of seeing whose got the biggest toys - it's just ridiculous, but we have other things facing us now that you know, they haven't used them this long, so perhaps they'll just sit there being dormant, and in the meantime we're wrecking the planet, so...

Seems to be an urge for destruction.

Yeah. Which is crazy, but hopefully, you know, that's what the next generation will be fighting for, I've no doubt, and maybe with that there'll come some wisdom, but yeah - I don't think consensus is the right you know - like you said about anarchism, but anarchy, as I understood it - as people talked about it - certainly Greenham ran on a system of anarchy - a small group of people would do something that they felt was

their - what they could do - to counter what was being done in spite of the fact that they had never consented to any of this. So there's a certain amount of anarchy that says well, the current electoral system doesn't work.

It is in-fact broken, like a lot of things before that.

Don't go down that road!

Are you involved in any activism of any sort now?

Not so much, but maybe when I retire I will be. Unfortunately, you know my job doesn't allow me an awful lot of time to do anything. But I talk to women who are um, very involved still - I go to meetings with women who are activists in different areas, um, against prostitution and things like that. I think I've still got a political brain that wants to do things, and you know - I did an assembly that was all about the vote and you know, what people fought for - and especially women, and things like that. So I think we can learn things from the way people have done it, but I'm not so sure the current system is working at all, really.

You're teaching 13 year olds English, am I right?

Yes.

What did Greenham give you, that you can use in the classroom?

(Laughs). Oh, resilience, absolutely resilience.

Who is more scary - the soldiers and the police or the 13 year olds?

Oh, probably the 13 year olds! (Laughs). But not so much these days, I mean I think, I think when you get used to teaching it's more of a partnership, really. The kids and you, you know, and if they trust you, and they will understand, but unfortunately I feel like - I mean it's another story talking about the education, you know it's because they've changed things, and they've made it so much harder, there's less opportunity for the kids to explore their own identities and what what's happening - it's all exam, exam exam, it's kind of scary that it is the case.

Do they know of your past at Greenham?

I don't think they even know what it is.

That was my next question.

If you tell a 13 year old...

Are any of these kids aware?

No. I can remember one of the staff who teaches R.S. asked me to come along one time, and they were talking about the nuclear thing and pacifism, and asked me to go along to a lesson and talk to them about the protests and Greenham common, and that was a few years ago. But mostly these days I think they don't even know what it was - they're not even aware of it.

So why do you think it's important for people to remember Greenham now - especially that generation?

Well I think mainly because it shows you - it's like the kid who came out against climate change, and is doing the Friday strikes. You know, because if you show that ordinary people can have a say, and can get their voices heard, you know it's never been um, you know, what was the - was it a John Lennon song 'as soon as you're born they make you feel small by giving you no time instead of it all', and it's kind of saying you know, never think of yourself as too small and unimportant to have a view, and to have a belief in something. And whatever you choose to go for, you know - like I said at Greenham it was talk to one other person, you could start a whole movement, you know, and that's the important thing. If you say 'you can only do it if you join this party or this party', and some people choose to do that, but not everybody can, and not everyday wants to. But simply having the strength of - the passion - the feeling that you need to right injustice is something that I think that we don't harness as much any more, and I think the youth will surprise us, because I think it will rise up again like it always does. And ordinary people will get their voices heard. Look at Malala, and she was just one girl, so you know, when you look at it - it's not been whole movements, it's not been a political party that has done something. It's been, you know - Nelson Mandela being, or um, you know er, anybody who does anything or speaks out, or Malala - I went to see her speak at, um at um, Southbank, when she came one time, and it was inspiring. My daughter got the book and lent me that, so I think you take inspiration from others that you think 'actually, she's a girl, she's not that old, she's a bit like me, and she's saying things - never forget that you have a voice'. I think it's important - saying about Greenham is important because it shows you that actually it didn't need the press, and it didn't need lots of other things, because what the press said wasn't necessarily true, but you can talk to other people, and even talking to one other person can change somebody's view. And you know if you do that, all of a sudden you're a movement.

Snowballs?

Yeah, exactly.

You were, or you are a feminist.

Yeah!

What impact, if any, do you think Greenham had on feminism?

I think it was, like I said one of the main things for me was that it was this huge discussion place where you could talk about anything under the sun, and bring different perspectives, and people could exchange their views. And that was hugely valuable. I mean there is this talk about getting away from this democratic model where you vote for one person who has to belong to a party organisation in order to get elected, and they've talked about this thing where you get different people from different walks of life - you give them a year out, and you give them all the exerts they need, and then they work their way to a conclusion. Wouldn't that be a better model? Because this one isn't working, and you know - it hasn't done for some time, and people are frustrated with it, and it seems to me that you know, just to get ordinary people who have got a voice, and who can do it in an environment where they're given access to those details, you know the public aren't stupid - they just don't have the background of knowledge - they're not allowed access to it because what did they say 'for the people, by the people, for god's sake don't tell the people'. There we go! (Laughs).

Um, just looking at my list of questions here. So we talked about Greenham's impact on your life. What do you think it gave you, really, in how you lived your life after Greenham? And what you're handing on to your daughter?

You know, I (laughs), it's funny, when I stayed on the Women's Herb Farm on Vancouver Island, and I came back wanting to know about medicines - orthodox medicines and planet medicines, and I also think there's a lot of mystique around - they were saying that now there's a lot of problems with drugs against bacteria, so those sorts of things are not working, so if we're not very careful - and it's not profitable for people to come up with new anti-bacteria drugs, and where are we going to go with that? And I can only think back to the plants, because we're going to have to stop being so industrialized about everything - not everything is about having a profit, and it's more about - and so I think my great love was always the plants, and then I think my other thing was I always wanted to teach, and I did have an English degree, and then I wanted to go back, and I wanted to just - I don't know, to help some of the younger generation. I don't think I have much of a voice at school - obviously I know you have to have a certain amount of direction towards the

end result, which is a piece of paper, but at the same time, I think school should challenge young people to think. So that was the other thing that I came out with...

Of Greenham?

Yeah, so a classroom is a forum for that - I don't push my own agendas, but I do ask them for what they think, which I think, a new think quite a lot of teachers do try and do that as far as they can, but English is the great leveler, because you can talk about every issue under the sun. I mean we're not allowed now to do things like *To Kill A Mockingbird* as a thing for GCSE, or *Of Mice and Men*, which was a microcosm of society because it talked about all the disadvantaged people that there were. So you do them in Key Stage 3, and you still get to ask those questions, and say to people 'what do you think?'. And when you read something like *To Kill A Mockingbird*, or *Of Mice and Men*, er and you read out the words - some racist words that are in the book, and I did have one kid to or three weeks ago say 'Miss, you can't say that, that's racist', and I said yes, but what would you rather - would you rather we erased all those words from the book and pretended it hadn't happened, or do I read it out and you say 'Miss, I am shocked at that' because that's the reaction I want from you - I want you to say 'I don't like that Miss, it sounds wrong' - you're right to feel like that, but if I don't do it like that, and we pretended - is there going to be people that deny who say 'well there's no words like that in the book - you're making it up, it's not real. So when you get that, you understand what it must have been like. Because we can't - that was so many years ago, but we need to know about this stuff. I teach about Anne Frank and the holocaust, I teach *Of Mice and Men*, I teach *To Kill A Mockingbird* - if we've got the time, um, Maya Angelou's book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and we say you know there's lots of things in that that helps us to understand why we need to be a diverse society that is inclusive or everybody, and I say whether it's gay people or black people or Muslim people or whatever, it doesn't matter. I think education should be the great leveler (laughs), and access to health things - I suppose that's what came out of it was my two passions to help, to foster that questioning, or to foster that way of thinking about stuff. So when you teach a text you teach them to question and to say that, and you don't white wash the words out of it because they need to hear this is what it was like - we don't want this to happen again - this is why you hear it, so you know what that feels like, and you can say 'I'm glad you said it was wrong, because it is, but we'll read the book anyway, and then you'll see why it was wrong'.

And thinking about Greenham, they learn a lot about the Suffragettes now at school, don't they?

Some, some.

Do they not do a huge amount?

Not masses. I don't know what they do in History. I'm English, but as I say - I did an assembly - whole school assembly about the Suffragettes and we looked at the woman who ran in front of the horse, and I don't know if you know, but Clare Balding did an investigation into the sash that she was trying to pin on, and so I showed that extract, and I showed an extract from the film Suffragettes as well, and to be quite honest you could have heard a pin drop - they were all like 'oh my god', and it wasn't that long ago, and so I ended up by saying 'you need to register to vote now, because if you don't register to vote you won't have a vote, and if you don't vote - you don't show up, your voice will not be heard'. Because you've got to work with the system you've got, do you know what I mean?

Do you think you'll do a Greenham assembly?

I think it's too far remote, I mean I could do - but I think it's too far remote from there...and I don't think the nuclear issue is at the forefront of what they're - I think climate change is more what they're...

Except it is still there, and it is still dangerous.

It is - of-course, but you can't, 'you've got to look at this because it's important'- everybody finds their own road to what they feel about it, do you know what I mean? So who knows.

So how long ago did Greenham - the gates shut in 2000, I think, didn't they - the last one?

Yeah, but there's....

So almost 20 years isn't it.

Yeah, but there's still a couple of women living there.

Even now?

Yeah, I think Katrina.

Oh I didn't know that..

..a little while ago she had a, I think it was her - she was filmed, you know there was a clip or something on the anniversary, and I think she had a caravan there and I think she was still there.

I think Sarah Hibson was one of the last...

Yeah.

...to leave.

And Katrina - she was still there.

Oh she was still there?

It's worth checking out. I mean I haven't been back for a longtime, so I don't know.

How did you feel when you went back? Was it ...

It was kind of odd, because it was a hive of - I mean some days - you never knew, some days it would be deserted, and some days it would be thronging with people, and some days it would be people you knew, and some days like I said - you'd go back, if you'd been away for a weekend or something, you'd go back and there wouldn't be anybody there. So um, yeah.

Did you feel nostalgic for those days?

Yeah, yeah, I think so (laughs). I mean I'm still in touch with some people - Rowan I'm still in touch with, um, but um and I thinks she's in touch with other people like Veronica and Jane, and a few people um, I think Katrina went back to Australia - eventually.

That's Dr Katrina?

Dr Katrina. Yeah, Dr Katrina went back to Australia. So people dispersed and did their own things, but when it's time for you to go, it's time for you to go. Um, and there was never any - 'well you should have been here' or anything like that. People just decided to go when they decided to go, do you know what I mean and it was like 'if you don't want to be here, then you shouldn't have to be here - it's fine!'.

I've forgotten how long you said you were there for, roughly?

Well I went for about 6...in the end, on and off it was about 2 years.

A long time. And then you started coming and leaving and coming back, or was it ...

Yeah, I think in the end I just decided I wanted to do something different - like you do. It was quite...

That you wanted to teach?

Well, no I wanted to go and learn about herbs first.

Oh you did that first?

I did that first, yeah, so I came back to London and um looked into, um, er, I think I went to the college of Phytotherapy, which originally was in um Tunbridge Wells, so I signed up to do that.

Very Greenham!

Yeah! Yes! Sort of. But I mean I loved that and um, certainly the women that you know, in Vancouver Island - I was more and more, I mean I've got loads of herbal books up there, so um, I loved that and I met lots of people that were very into that, and learn to be wary of having too many antibiotics and things. You know. I had a really good GP - I lived in Lewisham at one point, and I had a really nice GP, and she and I had an agreement she said 'I get that you're a herbalist,' she said 'but if I tell you to take an antibiotic, you'll take it, right?' And I went 'yep', and the time I did need it she went 'you're having the antibiotic', and I went 'yep right, that's good', because ...

That's how it should work - together.

Yeah, yeah. But it's funny because I think I applied for housing at that time, and I remember going along to the housing office and they wanted to fill in all the forms about where I'd been living, and they said 'what was your previous residence?' And I said 'an orange plastic bag', and he was like 'what?!' (Laughs). 'It was an orange plastic bag - I had a GoreTex as well, but it was an orange plastic bag over it.' 'Okay'. So it was a bit odd, it's quite funny because a lot of people signed on, and they'd come along and they'd interview you literally sitting on the slope from the um, the dole office, and they'd come along and they'd interview you, and word got out because if you had a bender, they classed it as being sort of..., and you got less money, but if you had a tent you were classed as having a dwelling, and therefore you got more money! (Laughs). Because the benders were far more stable, but if you had a tent that was like you could put it up and stay in it - it was very odd (laughs).

Who made up that slender difference?

Who knows! But they had their little clipboard, and it was like 'do you have a bender or a tent'? (Laughs). Ridiculous conversation! They did have a sanitary inspector who came along at one point, and they were going 'where do you wash? Where do you...' (whispers) 'over there, behind the bushes', and they were like (gasps). But actually we were very meticulously clean about it - no colored toilet paper, because that takes years to break down - Green Gate would have had a hissy fit about it if we'd used anything else but white paper - do you know what I mean? So people were more aware of the ecological things about it as well, so it's quite funny. But you either laughed or you cried there - sometimes it was just hysterical, and sometimes it was like 'oh god, I can't take this any longer'.

Yes, the cold in winter must have been pretty difficult?

Oh no, no, that wasn't a problem at all. No, no. The rain!

I was going to say - what was the biggest...

The rain was the most...

Damp?

...yeah, because if it rained for days on end, because I think it was Lady Olga Maitland who - she wrote the book, and we sat around and we read extracts - I don't think I ever met her - I might have done, but I can't remember now. Um and we were reading extracts - we used to read around the fire sometimes, we liked The Moomins - we read the Moomin books and things like that, and we were reading it and they were saying - actually we were a bit pissed with her, because she said things like 'and they were sitting there on this dismal slope, and they had this bowl - this pot of rice - which was the only thing to eat, and they occasionally they'd throw in a pimento as a bit of variety to the plain rice', and I thought we had some amazing meals - how dare you? I mean we know she meant it well, and maybe that night all they did have was rice with a pimento, but it was like oh my god, nobody will ever come here because they'll think we're just living such a terrible life, and actually a lot of the time it was fun, and we ate really well, and you know, people put a lot of love and care into the food - although there was a lot of in-fighting about the meat - that's why I lived at Violet Gate.

So you could eat meat?

Not necessarily so I could eat meat, because I didn't really care, but um, it's because - you know, it was so embracing of all lifestyles that I felt I fitted in there - where you could be virtually anything, and that's fine at Violet Gate. I think Rebecca Johnson came round one night, because she was mainly at Yellow Gate, and she came round and she said (whispers) 'I hear for Christmas Day you've got fish - can I come for Christmas dinner, because they won't let me eat anything like that at Yellow', and we said 'yeah, yeah, of-course' (laughs). But it was the weirdest thing, because you'd get people come and sometimes they'd give you like satsumas, and you think god, I've had fifteen satsumas today, but I haven't had anything else to eat - I wish somebody would come up - oh you got the weirdest things, because people would turn up, and I can remember a car pulling up once and they said (shouts) 'what do you need?', and I was sitting with Rowan, and went 'oh, can I have a bottle of whiskey and an apple pie with an R for Rowan on it?' She was just joking, and a week later same car pulled up 'is there a Rowan here? We've got a bottle of whiskey and an apple pie' (laughs). So it was just like...

Lovely...

Yeah, but people would come up 'oh do you need some wood?' You'd never see them again - or sometimes you would, do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

And it was just like people would just come up and say 'no, no, this is what - it's not much but I can give you that, so this is to help the whole thing'. And people were incredibly generous, you know, so that was - it was a bizarre existence, because you think my god, we're running out of wood, and I'd say to Annie or Judy 'what's going to happen next?' - when I was first going at Indigo, and um they'd go 'ah something'll turn up. Sure enough, somebody would drive along and go 'anybody need any wood?' And you'd go 'oh yeah, we could do with a load, or no we don't, but I think Violet Gate might need some'. And you know, that would be fine.

I hadn't thought about where the wood came from before. You'd need log delivered? You could get scrubby bits that had fallen on the..

Well we used to get pallets, pallets would, and things like everybody - lots of people - I remember having fireman's jacket - they were great because they were really weather-y proof and they were wonderful. So people like firemen would support you, I mean I can remember getting on a bus somewhere - completely random in the Midlands, and the guy looked at me - the bus driver - and he said 'where are you from?' And I went 'oh, Greenham', and he went 'you're not paying on my bus - on you go - you're not paying a fare on my bus, you go and sit down love'. And you know the

most random people would do their little bit of solidarity, you know - it was just heart warming, so you had all those things. And occasionally you'd get the mad woman who'd go 'oh, I want to know where the real Greenham women are - at Yellow Gate where the cameras are', and you'd just think 'go on, you just keep going, love' (laughs). So, it just depended.

Yeah. Any other memories you want to share?

I don't know - kind of got through quite a lot, haven't we. Ummmm - yeah, I think, um we've talked about pretty much - driving lessons and things like that, and the evictions, and yeah, I think there's - obviously...

There's always more.

There's always more, but yeah, I'm sure everybody else has got ideas as well.

And Greenham's legacy to the world, what do you think that is?

Network - talk to one person and grow it from there. Don't rely on the politicians to do it for you, because they're so tied up they don't know what the hell they're doing, and it's never been truer than now, and people can see it - you know. But, but talk to people who share your ideas, and then share them some more. I think it's got to come back to that in the end. I think we're entering a very different era, because I don't think - you know I, you know, I think things are broken, and I think they're broken universally - I don't think it's just an isolated thing, I think we've gone as far as we can in some directions, and we've got to find a different way of working - whether it's consensus and somebody sneaking off to cut the fence (laughs), just to move it along, or whatever. But we've got to change how we listen to people, and maybe it starts with the younger people - because they're going, you know, they're going to be dealing with it all - it's got to be what they feel passionate about and what they feel drives them, so you know - you can't tell somebody to get involved in a cause, they have to feel it for themselves and to, you know to embrace it on their own - they'll come to it, but if you ask them, teach them to question things, eventually they'll question something, and then they'll think well, I'm sorry but that's not right - and then they'll move on from there, so everybody will find their own path, I think - hopefully.