

Josetta Malcolm

So, um, Josetta, how did you come to be part of the peace movement, in the beginning?

I think I fell into it a bit by accident - like most things happen. Um. You know I was quite young when I went, I was only about 18, but I think my dad was quite a strong black, working class, union kind of person, so I did have a bit of a political upbringing, and lived in the city - Southampton. And basically I had a boyfriend - my first boyfriend - his mum used to go to Greenham, and there was quite a lot of Southampton women that went to Greenham Common, because it was half an hour up the A34 to get to Newbury where the camp is - was. So she, ironically, she gave me a lift to Greenham, because promptly fell madly in love with a woman (laughs), at Greenham Common, as soon as I arrived (laughs).

And when did you arrive? What year was that?

So that was in 1988, the summer of '88, so I was still 18 at that point, and just went with - you know, my mum's old canvas rucksack for a couple of nights, and just - not only fell in love with this woman, but fell in love with the whole thing. I didn't really know anything much about it, I had just heard of it. But you know, was into the sort of idea of pacifism and CND as much as I could be at that age, and yeah - just spending a couple of nights there really inspired me. So I basically went back to Southampton for a couple of nights, kind of broke up with my boyfriend over the next few weeks, and just kept going back to Greenham and staying longer and longer, really I was pretty much living there for the next two years.

Wow, okay! And what gate were you at?

So I started off at Orange Gate, because that's where all the Southampton women tended to go.

Right.

Um, so my first year I was mostly at Orange Gate, and then my second year I kind of moved to Blue Gate, where for some reason - I don't know, there were lots of vegans and lots of Librans! At Blue Gate (laughs), so I kind of fitted in.

Yeah.

All the gates had slightly different atmospheres - it was quite interesting - slightly different women.

Yeah, what did you make of - I mean what was your experience of that - the gates, I mean - the different characters?

Um, not - yeah - it's funny, so yeah I think Orange Gate there were lots of women from Southampton, but all different ages - maybe slightly older women, a few international women, I mean there were international women at all the gates - visiting and living there. And then Green Gate to me always had this more mystical, hippy, slightly odd atmosphere - not odd 'bad', but I was a little intimidated (laughs). That's because it was very beautiful - it was set more away from the road, whereas Orange Gate - it was near a lane from one of the main roads, you know, and obviously we camped more in the woods, but Green Gate felt like it was much more set back in the woods. And then there was Woad Gate, which for some reason there was just a couple of straight women that lived there, so that was kind of like the straight gate! (Laughs). And that was really not a nice gate to stay at, purely because it was literally just the perimeter road and no kind of woodlands, it was just the road and the gate, so you were always sat with your fire right by the road and the gate - it wasn't particularly beautiful. Um. And then just along from there was Blue Gate, which I loved because whilst it was kind of near to the road, so you still had the 'viggies' - the vigilantes - the locals would shout out their car windows, which we just thought was hilarious, really.

What did they shout, do you remember?

'Dirty lezzers', 'get a job' - just all kinds of homophobic abuse and just that, you know, I think some of it was just bored youngsters - that was something they could get away with doing, they clearly didn't know or understand really what we were doing. I mean the era that I was there - sort of '86-'88 there wasn't anything too serious that happened, um. I know earlier years there was some violence. I'm trying to think - while I was there, I think there was the occasional you know - someone's stuff - a tent would get ripped - because some of the vigilantes would, you know, do more kind of damaging things.

Do you remember how many people were there around that time?

It was quite busy - the first year I was there, there were still quite a lot of women, so you know - each gate, I mean Woad Gate was always really little, because probably no-one wanted to camp that close to the road, it wasn't that nice - there was only two or three there. But Orange Gate, when I was there, there was a good sort of - especially in the summer there'd be ten to twenty. Blue Gate maybe ten or fifteen. In

the winter it would dwindle because you'd be dealing with frozen water, frozen toothpaste, so (laughs), it was a lot harsher.

Did you stay there?

I stayed there the whole winter, yeah. Like lots of people I think I'd always go home - in the days when you could sign on really easily you'd go and sign on, get a shower, sign on for a couple of days, but um.

I was going to ask you - did you have to make any sacrifices to go - like with all the work and stuff like that, so presumably you were signing on?

Personally not, because I'd just finished - I'd just scraped through a couple of A' Levels and finished um, because that was the summer I would have just finished sixth form, so I was going to go to a technical college and do some more - I was going to do politics and philosophy A' Levels, and I basically gave those up because I very consciously decided I'd rather live it than study it any more.

Right.

So for me it was perfect timing. It's what I call my 'finishing school' - my Greenham years - two years! (Laughs).

Yeah, a lot of women do, actually.

Because it was - it was my political awakening - that's where I learnt stuff, I learnt a lot, and I wasn't working, um, I wasn't working anything formally, so there wasn't, and I didn't have kids - I was just 18. I don't feel like I gave up that much.

And how were your parents - you said your father was fairly political anyway - did your parents respond okay to you...

I'd actually run away from home on my 17th birthday, so I didn't - I was quite estranged, mostly from my dad, so I didn't really have a lot of interaction with him about it. I know because it was close to Southampton, that there was an image of me on the news when the local press - the local news were reporting about something at Greenham, and that's how like the Jamaicans of Southampton found out I was there. I don't know if I'd even really told my dad - he may or may not have known. But you know, especially back then - Jamaican culture is very, very conservative, it was more scandalous - like being a Rasta - my cousin next door was a Rasta and that was a scandal in our community. So me going to Greenham, which in lots of places is shorthand for also being a lesbian - that was also quite controversial.

So you never officially came out to your family?

Um, I did - to my dad. And he was just a little bit slightly offensive, and slightly dismissive about it, in the patriarchal 'women can't really do anything', which from the man - he always used to say 'which one is the man?' Even if - I was estranged, but even if I did see him - when I would pop back to visit him with friends, he'd always say 'which one's the man?' He would always say that to both of us. We just thought it was funny at the time - luckily - but it was also you know, there we go. It was the '80s. My mum was always much more supportive, um, and even though - she helped me run away from home, and so we stayed more in contact, but while she was still living with him I didn't see her much, until she left as well. She'd come and visit Greenham for the day and was really interested - she was always really interested. Always absolutely fine about my sexuality - never bothered. Nothing ever surprised her. I was scared, because after leaving home in those circumstances, I was - you know, I'd had this like, you know, I'd had this nice friendship with my mum, and I was scared to tell her that I was a lesbian, and got my sister to (laughs)! And my sister said that my mum said she already knew. And I think that's often the case - they know anyway.

Yeah. And so, could you tell us more - probably that was your first love affair with a woman?

Yes. Although unfortunately it wasn't a love affair with her! (Laughs). Managed a drunken roll around at a party that she took me to. There was lots of partying at Greenham - especially at Orange Gate, because we were a bit of a party gate, and I think some of the other gates - you were asking about - I never went, well I never stayed at Yellow Gate, but I know there was a little bit of a schism between Yellow Gate and some of the other gates which I didn't really understand or fully appreciate - being young and into partying, as well as into the politics. So yeah, we were more of a party gate. There'd be booze runs most nights and you know - we mixed it up.

So you were in a relationship with someone there or not? Or just wishing you were?

No, no, I was just wishing I was. I was in love with her for years...

Oh god!

...I mean we actually became good friends for many years. Yes.

It's interesting what pulls you to a place, and then you get pleasure in a different way, I guess?

Yes, I mean it wasn't her that pulled me there...

Oh, sorry...

...it was the whole thing of it, like it took probably a while for me to...but anyway with her yes, we had a drunken roll around one night at some party that we'd hitched to, at some big squat in Nottingham, but she never even knew I'd never been with a woman before - she didn't realise. She said years later that she would have stayed sober for the event if she'd known (laughs). But we did become friends - we're still vaguely in touch, you know with Facebook - we found each other and we both were in London for a while, so we did meet up, and she's married to a woman, and we've all had dinner together and stuff. Which is kind of funny, when you lived at Greenham 20/30 years ago and yeah - yes. But there were lots of relationships going on there, of course. Lots of queer drama, lots of various polyamorous and monogamous things and the dramas.

And was that kind of a strain to live around - in terms of you all living together and you all being kind of in each other's relationships, in a sense - you're observing the tensions and the good bits and the bad bits - all that kind of stuff. Did you find that difficult?

Not particularly, no. Obviously there were times when there was awkwardness, and times when certain women might need to like leave, or go to a different gate, but that was small - that was such a small part of it. I think, you know, because mostly - you know, and one of the things I learnt about Greenham - I was thinking about it this morning, was you know - things - small and massive things like communication - how you have relationships, and the whole idea of Greenham is you know, it's non-hierarchical, and we didn't have the language that we now have, but if you think about non-violent communication, I feel like that's what I was learning at Greenham, and that was the kind of spirit of Greenham that you wouldn't - you know, you wouldn't have like massive arguments - people would try to work stuff out and negotiate, and have loving, non-violent, peaceful communications with each other. There was, you know the personal is political was such a theme of Greenham, which is why we were there in the first place actually - we were making personal sacrifices and decisions to be somewhere, because that was our politics, and then actually how you interact in your intimate and friendship relationships is also part of your political.

So how did you, that sort of non-hierarchical thing, how did you...were there any sort of incidents you remember where you overcame challenges or problems in the camp in that way? What sort of strategies did you use?

Well, we had weekly meetings, that went on for hours (laughs)! There was always meetings, and women talked. There wasn't internet, there wasn't television, what you did was sit around and make food together, chop wood together, and dig shit pits together, and go on actions together, and you talk about stuff. So I think that that, you know, that meant we talked about things - we resolved things.

Did you have like jobs there? Did you have your own...

Yeah, there were things that people liked to do. So I really liked wooding, so I'd quite happily go off into the woods, find dead bits, bring it back, saw it up, make sure there was enough - that there was wood for the fire. So people did naturally like different things. There'd be booze runs, and there'd be shopping runs, and some of us - I could drive, so people that could drive were then the ones that would obviously drive. There were communal camp vehicles. We had brown van, love brown van - it was part of the family! Brown van was this old VW van that was like the camp van at Orange Gate, so you know - lots of women lived in tents we'd call 'get-aways' which were little red tent structures that were really easy to pick up and move if and when the bailiffs came. Um, but then there was also brown van, which some people would sleep in sometimes, but also useful just to have camp vehicles. So those of us who had mechanical skills, or could drive took more responsibility for vehicles and driving. Um, you know, we pretty much took it in turns - I can't remember how it was organised, there definitely wasn't a written rota, but we kind of shared it out, things like cooking and doing dishes, but people just stepped up to it - I don't remember it being much of an issue. For sure there were times you know, this is going back 32 years - for sure there were times when there were just loads of dirty mugs and people were annoyed, but I don't totally remember that. I also really liked anything physical - I liked, so digging shit pits, I liked! (Laughs), you know you just go off into the gorse and dig a big trench.

And were you a vegan then?

I was vegetarian when I arrived, and then I went vegan - because I just celebrated my 30th vegan birthday - I'm one of the only, or very few vegans from Greenham days who are still vegan - that I know of, that's just based on the people I'm still in touch with, so hopefully there's loads more. I went vegan in my second - after being there for a year. Once I'd heard and learned about cruelty to animals in the dairy industry, I then went vegan overnight - really easily. People were shocked, because I was - prior to then - really into cheese and chocolate. But it was just really easy - as soon as I knew what they did to animals. I think I've always just been quite um, sensitive about politics to do with animals, and ethics, and all that sort of stuff. So yes.

And so what kind of food were you eating there? Were you experimental with it?

There was always loads of nice food. We used to toast bread. We had these metal grills that you used to slap a bit of bread on it, and hold it over the fire, and you'd become expert at how to get the perfect toasting fire! Not too flame-y - like hot sort of embers were pretty good. So lots of toast with various spreads. I discovered tahini, and yeast extract that wasn't marmite. I learnt lots of things! And then there were food runs as well - so especially in the winter, I think it was mainly in the winter months lots of different peace groups and women's groups around the sort of nearby - so all the south of England, would - on a rota - bring us hot meals in the evening. Which in the winter months when it was dark and cold would be a lifesaver, because they'd bring - I mean it was a long time, I mean I still don't really eat many baked potatoes and stews because...

There was so many?

...there was two years of every night, baked potatoes and stews. That was easy to transport, but some women - I remember Abbingdon women's groups used to bring the most amazing food, like lovely peas and puddings - and we'd always be really excited on the Abbingdon women's night! (Laughs). And yeah, but you know - lots of salads. We were a few miles from Newbury - the nearest town, but occasionally we'd go in, and there was maybe one cafe that would serve us, and a pub that would let us in in Thatcham, and maybe one pub in Newbury. Lots of places didn't. Like Greenham women and wouldn't let us in - they just said, you know, because we were considered to be smelly, dirty lesbians, so you know you'd go in shops and they would literally spray air freshener at you, and probably we did smell, but we'd smell of wood smoke more than anything. I had a wash in the woods every day - I'm very fastidious about hygiene.

How did you do that?

Take a bowl, and just go and wash in the woods and also. the lovely Quakers let us use their meeting house in Newbury, so we could have showers and do laundry there. And then there was one cafe that we could go and, in the days when I ate eggs - egg and chips, or just chips - there was a cafe that would serve us. But lots of shops wouldn't. Food shops - you could go and buy food shopping, but lots of shops and the health shop was fine.

How did that feel to have that sense of negativity?

Um, mostly - especially as a kind of teenager - mostly we had a 'fuck you' - excuse my language - attitude towards it, I think we were just like - we knew we were in the right, and they hadn't caught up, and we were like - ultimately we were there to save the

planet, and I think we were all really fired up by that. You know, yes we had booze runs, and had lots of fun, and all the rest of it - but actually we were there to save the planet. And in that era in the '80s, it was still very much a time when people were worried about nuclear disasters, and I think maybe people can't appreciate that now, that that's the kind of - I guess now the comparison is obviously the climate - climate change and the planet on the verge of extinction - and back then it was nuclear - the days of Cold War.

Were you terrified of..

I wouldn't say I was terrified, but I was very keen to protest about nuclear arms, and I felt very strongly that we needed to get rid of nuclear arms.

Did you feel the threat of that was imminent, or did you feel it was an option - a possibility?

I felt like it was a strong possibility, I would say, and that it was something we needed to stop, and that politically it was something we needed to raise awareness of. Because of course the whole thing about Greenham was flying in the face of the Ministry of Defense's ideas that they could just - there was lots of funny, there was lots of things like their idea that they could just hide missiles and hide military maneuvers and hide the fact that there was this massive, massive American military base in the middle of the beautiful countryside - that they destroyed - I don't know how, I mean it was a 9 mile perimeter fence, so that area of natural common land was destroyed by the base. And that they could fly in nuclear missiles and take these missiles on exercises down to Salisbury Plain, and on some of their blurb it was that no-one would notice - it would be a safe thing to do, and so part of our protest was that when they were exercising these vehicles they'd maneuver them at nighttime - from Newbury and Greenham Common down to Salisbury Plain, and that's when we would do lots of action so that's when we would have fires and singing, and lots of women, and we'd throw what we call 'gloop', which is like flour and water with food colouring, so that there was something we could splatter on the side of the vehicles that would make them visible and not camouflaged.

Right, right.

So that was a lot of the work we were doing was those sorts of protests, and it was kind of flying the face of the Ministry of Defense saying no-one would be bothered by this, that it was safe and secret - so that no-one would see the vehicles going there, so we - you know we were protesting that. And we would sometimes go down to Salisbury Plain and try and do actions on Salisbury Plain, that was a little - that was a bit dangerous. That was the scariest thing I'd ever done, because on Salisbury Plain

you were - I mean you also have American squaddies with their weapons. And there was a massive drug problem in the base - as there is in the military anyway, but that's not widely talked about in the media, but I remember coming across a squaddie with very blood shot eyes and a loaded gun, and you know - well a gun, which I presume was loaded, on Salisbury Plain in the middle of the night - because obviously they would exercise vehicles and do maneuvers in the night, so we would do actions in the night. And that's why part of the action was always about signing, because women singing makes it obvious we're women, and that we are the Greenham women, which they were used to - because we'd just, you know, been doing this for years, since '81, so by '86 they were very used to, and bored of (laughs) for sure - Greenham women. So yeah, the singing was really important to identify yourself as a woman.

Did you experience any kind of, um, violence from those people?

I personally didn't, but I know other women did.

Right, did you witness any of that?

I didn't witness anything, and I think I went towards the end of Greenham being quite busy in terms of lots of women - lots of peace women. In the early days, so '81 and the first few years, I think there were thousands more women who would do and do actions, and I think there was a lot more, I think in the early days, a lot more violence and hostility. So I didn't witness anything.

So did you feel that the relationship between the sort-of male figures of authority and the Greenham women had changed, then?

Um, probably, I mean I can't compare it to something I didn't experience.

No, of course, yeah.

But I think it was less violent, but there was still hostility. There was still a bit of an us and them thing - I mean we were a pain in the arse for sure. We did lots of damage, we did lots of disruption.

Do you remember what you did, personally? In terms of damage and disruption (laughs)?

I don't want to incriminate myself.

No, fair enough. I can cut that out. Were you ever arrested?

I was arrested numerous times. So I was arrested within the first, I barely even knew what you were supposed to do if you were arrested - I was arrested within a couple of days of ever going there. And for sure as one of the very few people of colour I was the first person to be arrested in a whole group of people doing the exact same thing, and that was again on a night when they were exercising - taking out the military vehicles from Greenham and to take them down to Newbury. And we built fires and there was fire engines and a fire hose. I just remember that I picked up a fire hose, and got arrested for that. For holding a fire hose, because it was - I got arrested for obstruction, and then got put in a prison van thing for hours. So many hours that when it got to court they didn't put me in prison because the judge said, the magistrate said that I'd already been - I mean it was hours and hours and hours, because I was the first to be arrested, and it went on all night.

So can you tell us about that experience?

So again I was really young - I was 18, but you just keep your spirits up, and as soon as someone else had been arrested and they were in the same van it meant, well it made it a bit easier, and then more and more of us. So these prison vans are basically vans with lots of tiny, tiny cubicles - I think there may or may not have been a little seat in there, but you're basically enclosed in a tiny box, so it's quite claustrophobic, and I didn't really know what was going on, how long I'd be there, what was going to happen to me.

Did you have enough air and that kind of thing?

Yeah. Yeah. I had air, but there was no windows - it was like being in a box - no windows, no phone for entertainment, no book, no nothing just for hours. But as soon as other women came in, we could talk and we could sing, and that was always the things that we would sing - we'd learn songs and we'd sing. And entertain each other, and make the best of it. So yeah, that was probably it - I'd been at Greenham days, (laughs), definitely not even weeks, it was like within days of being there.

Were you afraid? I imagine that'd be quite a scary experience for you?

A little, a little. You know there's something about being a teenager where yes you're scared, but you take things in your stride because it's all new, and it's all exciting, and it's all different, and everything's a bit scary. But I've just always been interested in doing things that are a little bit different, and a little bit scary.

And did you ever go to prison?

So I didn't, I escaped prison because I'd been enclosed in that space for so many hours, and I think then again because it was a later era, they weren't really putting women in prison when I was there - that was much earlier, because it costs loads of money to put women in prison. I think that's my only - I've only ever had one or two court appearances, because what, I got arrested all the time - we were always cutting holes, going into the base, and um doing actions which ranged from graffitiing, to causing a lot of damage to vehicles, and women used to break...there was a whole American base, so obviously there was lots of Americans and shops and church, and I know a couple of the Christian Greenham women would break in and go to the church, and attend a service and then come back out again. But there was lots of breaking in and doing a bit of damage, and then getting chased by the police - the Ministry of Defense police, and often getting arrested, and often escaping them - they couldn't always keep up with us. I used to, because I was a sprinter at school - I kind of prided myself in outrunning them, so I did out run them and get back out again a few times, as did quite a few women. I also just got arrested numerous times - well detained numerous times. Some of it was just about clogging up their system but it was tedious rather than scary. So there were lots of portacabins that were there for the purpose of 'processing' - is what they call it. If they caught you in the base doing something, they would - rather than take you to a police station outside - you'd be put in a portacabin and processed there. So where they'd want to find your name...

Because it was that frequent?

Yeah, yeah, so they'd just like take your emails.

So do you think they felt that it wasn't really working for them if the women just kept on and on and on.

Yeah, for sure.

There was no real consequence?

Yeah, in those days - no. A few court appearances. It depends on what you got caught doing - if you got caught doing lots of full o criminal damage then you would get done for that. But most of us in those days escaped that. Um, and were basically done for trespass. So trespass was the main thing, and then of course years later because it came out that Michael Hesaltine - the base was illegal, Michael Hesaltine hadn't got the full, or the correct, planning permission, and so once that came out lots of got compensation, thanks. So, because we'd been therefore - because most of us had been arrested for trespass, and cautions had been held, and some women put in

prison, and taken to court for trespass, we could then claim all kinds of damages and costs.

Wow, and so you actually got that compensation.

Oh yeah, yeah.

And was that a decent amount of money?

I can't remember now, but to me as a teenager a few hundred quid was a lot of money. I don't think it was more than a few hundred quid - because I hadn't been to prison, but that compensated me. I don't know what women got who had been to prison.

Right.

I know lots of women had been in prison.

So um, when you were there - that's long after the decisions to make it women only.

Yeah.

What did that space mean to you - that sense of women only space?

It was everything! It was amazing. It was so empowering. And I think for me, growing up in quite a strict Jamaican 'lock up your daughters' kind of household where I didn't have any freedom, which is half of why I ran away from home - that I wasn't allowed to do anything other than school. Um, you know - I'd had no freedom, and I didn't feel very empowered as a woman. I'd been the victim of various kinds of abuse and did not feel empowered as a woman, and was quite scared, and had mental health problems and you know - to come into a space that supported women with mental health problems, and just for being women, and to give me a language and a political understanding, and a realisation that this is patriarchy - this isn't just me having a difficult childhood, this is what the world is like.

Yeah.

So I was, you know - it was really liberating. It was like therapy, it was like a political awakening, and um, a political education. Um, and lots of fun, just to be around women - these amazing strong women from all around the world who you know - we had women from Eritrea, women from the sort of the, the, the Pacific Non-Nuclear Proliferation Campaigns, and just to see how things linked up - that there was

something linked up about patriarchy, and nuclear arms, and war and to make those connections was really quite amazing. To realise that patriarchy is violent and that it's about male violence, and what happens to me, and what happens to lots of women is actually a thing that's male violence, and that's about patriarchy. It isn't down to an individual not being able to help themselves, or being a bit messed up - it's actually part of a structural system, and I think when you understand that, and then when you meet lots of other women, and you're in a space where it's safe - we get heard, and we get to talk about it, because I know a lot of the impetus of Greenham being women only was because of all the sexual assaults that still happen in mixed peace camps and mixed spaces. Actually to be in a women only space and then have your voice heard as a woman is so empowering, because men still take over, men still mansplain (laughs), they still dominate, you know - the kind of activist spaces are still quite male dominated. Which is very sad - all these years later. Although I think - I don't know, it's all very new, but I went to Planet...an Extinction Rebellion demo last weekend, and that felt refreshingly female - in Brighton, anyway. So I think, you know, women have always been strong and powerful and done stuff - anti slavery, Suffragettes, blah blah blah. I think a lot of politics, and a lot of alternative and activists kind of politics are very dominated by men, and Greenham was my first realisation and awakening that women can be strong and powerful, and are clever and have the answers, and that actually matriarchal approaches are better than patriarchal approaches, and trying to work things out is better than being adversarial, and using violence creates more violence, and that we can be pacifists in our approaches. That was just really empowering, and I think also for me as a mixed race woman, that then kind of, I think the political awakening around feminism also opened my eyes up more towards race politics, which was really important for me - growing up in a mixed race family - being mixed race, there's just lots of issues there, having gone to quite white schools, and then Greenham was quite white dominated.

So how did that feel?

I think because I'd gone to mostly white schools - even though where I grew up in inner city Southampton was very, very black, but I'd gone to a school 3 miles/4 miles outside which was very white, so I think I'd internalised a lot of racism, and I think I'd internalised a lot of stuff that the positives of which meant I was quite comfortable in all white spaces in lots of ways, but also at that point I didn't have a language for understanding race in any way near that I do now - 30 years later, and also in the '80s there wasn't the awareness around race issues that there is now, so it kind of wasn't massively spoken about, and I was too young to really get it, but I know that that era, and then soon after Greenham - I moved to Bristol, or spent more and more time in Bristol, where there's really good black politics - that's where I started reading and learning about black politics. But also at Greenham I came across people like Audre Lorde, and Toni Morrison - lots of black women, and black lesbians, so I kind of came

across black women's writing and politics at Greenham. So it did link up in that way, but I think it was uncountable without me realising, in the same way as I'm often uncomfortable without realising always why, because you know - a bit like being in Brighton - if I'm in a group it's often going to be quite white dominated. And in queer spaces, they're often quite white.

Yeah.

It almost becomes a bit of the norm.

But you never experienced any racism at Greenham?

Not that I remember, no. But I was so young, and I didn't have the politics and the awareness that I have now. So I think if it was now, I'd have a really, really different take on it, and I'd take issue with a lot of the different stuff that was going on. Like the very fact that it was so white dominated is institutionally racist in my opinion - but I didn't have that awareness at the time.

Do you think it would be now, if it happened again, though?

Would it be so white?

Yeah. Do you think it would be more diverse?

I think it might be a little more diverse now, and I think there'd be lots of difficult conversations, and I think there'd be a lot of white fragility and white tears (laughs), because that's kind of what happens - especially around white activist women, white lesbians - I think they're quite fragile, because they find it very, very difficult to accept that they've got any privilege. And I think people who find it hard to accept privilege...

That's the whole point?

Yeah. Yeah. And how women are socialised, it's a bit of a go-to to then become really upset, and make it all about your being upset, and not about racism. (Laughs). Or the black women. And in my experience in more recent years where I've been in spaces where it's come up about, say for example I've been to a black space and a couple of white women have even there, because they're interested in knowing or hearing or learning about black issues, and we've challenged it - that's what's happened - you get white tears and white fragility. (Laughs) - rather than going 'oh yeah, sorry, I'll go to a different workshop' they find it really difficult that they can't go to this one.

Which is very much the 'not all men' thing - it's the same thing played out.

Yes, same thing - same difficulties. You now I'd be really interested to know how it would be if I was this age when I'd gone to Greenham, or if Greenham was now, the different conversations we'd be having around racism. In the '80s people didn't really, you know - it was all so new even to have the conversations, like race legislation had only come in in the '70s, it was just you know, yeah - words that people could say then that aren't acceptable now. It's very different climate now. Like the racism stuff happens in a very different way.

And just in terms of um, NVDA - how did that affect you when you were there, and how has it gone on to affect you in your life afterwards?

Again I think that was something else that was so revolutionary for me, and needed so many things - so one, I think it's a very, very useful tactic. I think its a revolutionary tactic...who said it, was it Audre Lorde? 'The master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house' - I'm pretty sure that's Audre Lorde. Um, but I really like that concept, and believe in it - that you can't use violence to get rid of violence, it makes no sense logically, anyway, but all it does is crate continuing spirals of violence. So that concept I found really powerful, and also having been raised in quite a violent upbringing - on a personal, again coming back to the personal as political, I think that that was very reassuring and liberating that again it is about a structural problem, and that male violence, and violence in the world is a structural problem, and it's about power, it's about patriarchy, it's the nature of capitalism, and various things - colonisations and slavery, you know - Empire built on violence, and actually we need something very, very different and opposite to dismantle that. So for me, non-violence is really, really politically important, and was, and again it was like - I keep going back to this, but it was my finishing school. It gave me a language and understanding for what was happening in the world, and how people interact in that, and so we have this idea that politically we can use non-violent direct action to raise awareness about issues, and to protest about issues without buying into the violence that we're trying to protest about.

Yeah, and do you have any particular memories of women really successfully using NVDA at Greenham?

Yeah - lots of it. All of it! I mean the whole thing...

Just something that really made an impression on you, or..

I think things like the visibility - trying to make visible what they tried to do in secret, and creating all of that awareness, and I think the legacy of Greenham, because you

can argue the case about whether the sort of government's signing of treatise to reduce nuclear arms was much or nothing to do with Greenham women. But you cannot dispute the fact that Greenham women raised visibility and awareness of the fact that there were nuclear bases in this country, and that there are, you know, military establishments doing dodgy things around the country, and so that visibility is NVDA. Us sitting on the fence, us setting fires, us getting media attention, us spreading awareness is all successful NVDA.

Did you have interactions with the media, yourself?

Not really that consenting and directly. When I was saying earlier about lots of people in Southampton realising I was in Greenham, in my Jamaican community, was because Southern news had actually spliced a picture of me nodding to a completely different question, but they'd put it on the news - I think it was a black woman at Yellow Gate - someone at Yellow Gate was talking and this is the time there was a bit of a schism between Yellow Gate and the rest of the camp, so it was all quite interesting that they were interviewing and had the sound of the women they were talking to at Yellow Gate, with me as a black woman, and I don't know - again this is 30 years ago, so I can't remember what the conversation was, but it was relevant that they had cut to a black woman nodding - to something someone else was saying - I think about racism. They had interviewed me, because I was nodding, and they'd used just the visual of me nodding, not the conversation we'd had in the interview. So I remember that there was that, but otherwise I didn't do a lot of media work - I think because I was new and young it probably went to women who knew much more, and could articulate much better than me. I did things like I went to some talks, and talked to different women's groups, you know, as a young Greenham woman, but I don't remember doing much media work.

Who were the sort of people there that you loved and cared about, and why did they make an impression on you?

Wow, there Carolyn Garrett, who was my first woman love, who - I remained friends with her. There was - there were lots of women. My best friend who I'm still in touch with - Jen - we met at Greenham and just instantly best friends. She now lives near here in Sussex, so I still see her lots. Her now partner I was friends with. There were three sisters who used to come to Greenham, so I'm still in touch with some of those. Um, a woman who did my first tattoo I've seen her more recently in London.

What's the tattoo?

I'll show you. Her name is Ellie, she's a great tattoo artist. In the days when we all started getting tattoos, thankfully when my friends were getting dolphins I decided to

design my own, so I've got more of an abstract sort of um doodle. Self portrait - women's.

How would you describe that, and what it means?

It's kind of like a stylised face, nose, it's got curly big wide nostrils, which is relating to my kind of ethnicity - I guess. And then a swirling labyrinth-y type mouth which could also be - again this is in my post Greenham days, so it's also a bit about being a woman, so it could be womb and ovaries, so there's a lot going on.

It also feels like noise coming from the mouth, do you know what I mean - like having your voice heard.

Oh!

Beautiful.

Thank you. I hadn't thought of that, but I'll say it's that now! So yeah, Ellie the tattoo artist who went out with one of the three sisters that I know, and who else? Lots of people that were vegan that inspired me, like Atlanta and someone called Iso - the first person that I fell for, er Carolyn and Iso were together for many years, and one by one a lot of us lived in Cornwall, actually - so when I first moved to Cornwall I lived next to Carolyn and Iso. so lots of women I've stayed in touch with more or less over the years, which is really nice. And then more recently - oh my goodness, I was at a friend's 50th birthday party in London, and sat next to this woman who I'd seen at various black prides, because she's a white woman who has adopted a couple of black kids - beautiful kids, um, and then she said - we were chatting, got on to Greenham and I realised that she was Jo who used to live at Green Gate, who was one of those women that I could barely speak to I was so intimidated - she was so beautiful. You know that thing, especially when you're young - you think everyone else knows it all, so then yeah, I was sat next to her at a party.

Do you remember, you know those moments when perhaps older people say things to you which really land, you have a sort of epiphany about what they've said politically, and it really means something to you later on - were there any kind of things like that, or is that a bit too specific a question?

Um, I'll probably think...

I can imagine there were gems of wisdom?

There were gems of wisdom the whole time, that's it - it's hard to think of any particular thing. I think there's the overall thing about the empowerment of it all, and the politics of it all, and learning so much about everything, and connecting everything. But I can't think of particular instances. But there was definitely lots of inter-generational learning both ways. From a woman called Mel, who lived in Newbury, who was a truck driver who taught us, and did loads of car mechanics for us, and taught us car mechanics, to practical stuff - the woman bringing food, to all the stories, to the international connections and the connections between our campaigns and other related campaigns and just generally meeting and being inspired by lots of old women - women of all ages.

Yeah. And in terms of art and the way in which the women used crafting and painting and different kinds of artistic mediums, did you get much involved in that as a form of protest?

Not really living at Greenham, because you were quite limited in what you could do actually at Greenham. For sure that informs some of my art practice when I got into painting and things, but in terms of crafting we used to sit and make knottings - you know like friendship bracelets.

Yeah.

I think we called them 'knottings' or 'knottees' or something in the day, but we used to make lots of those and give them to each other and wear them - that was a bit of a thing.

But did you make banners and things like that?

I personally - yeah we did make some banners when there was protests, and particular protests happening.

Do you remember what was on them?

Not off the top of my head.

What might you put on a banner now?

Um, I mean 'Greenham women are everywhere' was something we'd say a lot and graffiti a lot, so we would have had those on banners, and um - what would I put on a banner now?

Yeah, just in terms of the challenges we're facing politically now?

I guess 'stop climate change'. It'd be about climate change. I would say. Still a lot of stuff around male violence. That hasn't changed (laughs). We're still experiencing sexual and male violence I would say - that's still quite a big issue.

Yeah. And why do you think - one of the reasons why we're doing this project is obviously to raise awareness of the political significance and impact of Greenham for younger generations as well, which are largely....

Sorry...it's just come to my mind something that I would want on a banner now would be stuff like what's on my t shirt - 'queers against borders'. Actually thinking about what's current is a lot of stuff about stuff about migration and borders. I'm a total no borders person, and a prison abolitionist, and I think those are really key areas of protest now...

Especially with Brexit, where we're advocating for free trade - movement of trade, but not movement of people.

Yeah, and all the racism, um, that's kind of fueling a lot of the Brexit debate and the anti-immigration idea and just the fact that people are fleeing wars, and why are there wars? And why is there struggle for resources? And that's actually, you know the British Empire - the past British Empire has a lot to answer for, and actually it needs to share out resources and give reparations to people in countries that have been obliterated partly by the previous colonising policies, and actually people fleeing the aftermath of that - trying to get help - should be helped.

Yeah.

I feel quite strongly about that.

Yeah, and in terms of younger generations today who feel, who aren't necessarily as aware of Greenham as they could be - why do you think that is? Why do you think?

I guess it's a few things - it's interesting how, I'm actually happily surprised how much people do know about Greenham when I talk about it. It's very rare that I talk to younger people who don't know, but that might just be my queer, political bubble and my Brighton bubble, and the London bubble that I live in. Maybe outside those worlds it's less none about, but I think actually there is a lot of knowledge and awareness of it that you know, people are like 'oh wow, you did that - that's amazing', you know.

And what do you feel the sort of interpretation of Greenham is in our culture? Because it has had a few artistic impressions or it, and representations of it and things like that. How do you feel about it? Do you feel it's accurate?

I don't know, I can't say I've seen much or know much to comment on that.

I guess that's a problem in itself then, isn't it - that there isn't much.

Yeah. I mean going back to the first part of that question is anything that women do is generally under the radar, so it's not widely known - it's not taught in school, which is why the archive is so important is because otherwise we're going to vanish from history, and it's now - I was a teenager in the '80s, and I'm now 50, so the women who were in their 20s/30s/40s are going to be dying out, and that's why it's so timely to be recording this before you lose all the voices, and the awareness and the learning.

Yeah, so how would you say - not just Greenham, but generally your other sort of activism across your life - I imagine - you seem like you're very involve - how has that affected your personal life, and do you personal and political lives integrate?

Still. Always. I'm a queer person of colour and non-binary person of colour, so everything about me is political, because of my identities I can't - not that I want to because I don't, but I couldn't get away from it even if I wanted to, and I'm vegan - all of that is very political. And I think that a lot of the awareness of those identities and the veganism came about from Greenham, from Greenham days, and having the awareness and the courage and the passion to articulate and feel like what I am is okay, and is a political thing. That comes from Greenham and the idea of, you know, 'fuck patriarchy', 'challenge authority', you know challenging the status quo, challenging the idea that you have to be one thing and can't be a mixture of things. Or that you can't just be who you are.

And has that affected your work, or your relationships?

I think it has, yes. Multiple identities affects your relationships, it affects who you are - how you are. It can make life difficult, it limits in some ways what i want to do, and where I feel comfortable being, but it also is a far more fantastic thing in that I love my identities, I love that I'm different, I love the fact - in lots of ways - that I've had mental health problems and that I've learnt to manage those problems and now I use them in my yoga teaching work, in my mental health work that I do for charities, and the advocacy work. It's like all those things that can be seen as difficult you can challenge and use.

Do you feel like the time at Greenham helped you find ways to manage mental health?

I wouldn't say it helped me with that, because that was too long ago. I was unaware I even had mental health problems or what mental health was at 18 - that wasn't anything I was very aware of. But all the other stuff about feeling empowered, and within your right to be whoever it is you are I definitely learnt - the seeds for that were sewn in Greenham. You know, that's in my DNA (laughs)! And I think it's in the DNA - there's something unique about Greenham and Greenham women, and that's it's now in our DNA - that experience, that knowledge, that learning, that approach to life.

Yeah. So in terms of legacy, what do you think Greenham's legacy is? You talked a little bit earlier about there maybe some ambiguity around the impact of Greenham, but in terms of its actual - if you had to...

I'd say the legacy is ongoing, I'd say the legacy is many things. There are the thousands of women who were touched, who either lived there, or who were raised by women who lived there or visited there, or supported it, or knew about it - and I think all of those politics that we've talked about that came about from Greenham - that's the legacy, it's like a learning that's been passed on, and those of us who went there that are still around hold, and live our lives informed by that.

Do you think other campaigns use strategies that Greenham used?

I think so, yes.

Have you been on any?

So yeah, well yeah - like the Rebellion - the Extinction Rebellion - that's all about NVDA, and I think lots and lots of political campaigns like the shut down Yarl's Wood - the anti detention centre campaigns, the you know...

In what way do you feel the Yarl's Wood?

I think just the idea of using NVDA - the idea of making visible and making a loud noise about something governments are trying to hide - it's completely oppressive - how people who have fled other countries, who have been tortured come here and are then put in prison indefinitely - and they are prisons those detention centres - how those people who are so traumatised, and the self harm and the suicide attempts and the completing suicide is horrific in those places, and the sexual assault by the private security companies that are working there is horrific, and that's all been

documented. You know, but the general public don't seem to be making any noise or general concern about it, so making protests and being there - going there and being visible and making a noise, and also waving at the women in the detention centres who can just about stick their hands or wave something out the window - it's so moving, I mean you can't go there and not cry at one of those protests. I think that kind of thing is a legacy of Greenham - just the idea of making a noise about something that the government are trying to do on the quiet.

Yeah. Yeah. Great. Did you want to add anything in - any particular moments or memories or anything like that?

I have so many lovely memories - so many fun parties! Like we did all the protests and it was all very serious as well, but we had - that's maybe one of the criticisms from other gates to other gates - that we also had lots of fun. I will try to dig it out, but I know I've got a photo of me at 18 with multi coloured dreadlocks and bells in my dreads sitting on top of Orange Gate and very happy with myself - very pleased with myself! Just that, I don't know - for me that kind of symbolises the fingers up to the authorities and the establishment that think they can do what they want, and they can't - we're going to make a protest, and actually we're going to sit on your fence! (Laughs). We're going to reclaim it. Yeah.

Why did you leave Greenham?

I think two years was enough for me. I still went back and visited.

What did you go on to do straight afterwards? Because I imagine living inside was quite challenging?

Yeah, and it still is - that's like me today 'can we be outside?' I mean I'm - you know, both my parents grew up in the countryside - in Jamaica and Dorset respectively, um - I've always loved being outside and in nature, and that's definitely still there. I loved living outside at Greenham. I loved that I had two years of living in the woods in the gorse. So yeah, yes.

What sort of structure did you live in when you were there?

At first I had one of these little red get-away tents. I think I then soon progressed onto like a bigger tent, and lived in the tent. Mostly I lived in tents.

Did you live on your own in the tent?

Yeah, yeah definitely. Space freak! Especially when you're surrounded by people, yeah definitely.

Did a lot of women do that, then?

I think a fair amount - I mean there were some couples and sometimes you'd have a friend stay with you, and you'd share with a friend, and it'd be warmer for sure.

Yeah, could you tell us a bit about winter actually?

Oh my god it was so cold! That's why now I hate being cold. Also I was a lot bigger then - I was about 3 stone bigger, and I don't know that I could live there at 8.5stone! (Laughs). Because I think that layer of fat protected me against some of the cold, and also you know, when you're a kid you can do stuff...I'm such a wuss now, I can't imagine anything worse than living in the cold for two winters. There's no way I'd do that - I like my comforts, my flush toilet, my un-frozen toothpaste, my kettle that I can plug in. But you just get used to it all, you know again it's...

Was the cold painful?

Um, I don't remember it being so painful, but I remember layers and hot water bottles and hiding in the tent a bit, and hugging the fire - sitting around the fire and building big fires and having your little breaks away from camp now and again was really important.

Yeah. We've had some women tell us that they woke up with snow on their faces.

I don't remember that, but there was definitely icicles and frozen water and frozen toothpaste. You know, it's hard work, I really - I could do that at 18, I wouldn't do it now - not with my knees! (Laughs).

Oh that's amazing. Was there anything else you wanted to add? I think I've asked a lot - you've covered such a lot of ground.

Just that it was such a beautiful experience, it's like the best days of my life in lots of ways. Yes there were hard bits to it, and you know - yeah - I've always struggled with depression and stuff like tat, but I had so much....

Do you think about it a lot?

I do. I do. Yes.

I suppose if you're still in contact with people, you must talk about it a lot as well?

We do sometimes, and it's funny - it makes me realise - especially with this couple that are just up in the countryside near me, how little we talk about it sometimes, but it's always there. It's almost like we grew up together.

It's kind of like going to university?

Yes. Exactly. So you don't always talk about it with your uni friends from 30 years ago, but you do sometimes, and it's a shared history and experience - and what a moment. You know I just feel so lucky to have been able to be there and to share in that learning and in that connection and just the fun that we had - the drinking!

Have you read many books about Greenham?

I haven't - I've got a few, but um, I don't know - I never quite get round to reading them.

I suppose you've already lived it, haven't you?

Yeah.

It's just so interesting - really interesting interviewing someone who went later to the camp, because we've interviewed a lot of people who were setting it up, and they're very early on, and it's really lovely, actually to see how that early work moved into something so beautiful and you know - because I think it was hardcore for some of those women.

Yeah.

Some of the experiences of prison.

Yeah, I think so. I think I was lucky not to go to prison. I was lucky not to be attacked by vigilantes, not to be beaten up by bailiffs and police.

It's awful though to feel that you're lucky to have escaped that though, isn't it?

Yeah, but I know it was much harsher, I mean we had to put up with the bailiffs coming every few days, and having to over everything, but I think they were very aggressive to women earlier on. So yeah, I mean gosh - hats off to the women that did that, and who set it up.

Yeah. But great that it became this very sort of party, beautiful place - like university, where you could go and be politicised.

Yeah, and do actions. I think it's okay that we had fun when we did - we did our actions.

Yeah, of course - I think they had fun too.

For sure! I hope so - I hope they enjoyed it.

For sure. It's just interesting - different people's take on it, and just the difference of the gates as well.

Um hum (agrees) yeah.

Oh, you haven't told me much about Blue Gate.

Oh yeah, Blue Gate - so there were lots of vegans, lots of vegans - I feel it was slightly younger, slightly more punky, very vegan, lots of Librans (laughs). Yeah, it felt like it was much more me when I got there. I felt like..

Why did you move?

...I wonder how much of it was a class thing as well? Although I think generally Greenham was pretty middle class. I think I morphed around to Blue Gate because you know, you always end up visiting, and I just landed at Orange because of the Southampton connection, and that's where I first was, so that's where I ended up staying, and was immediately welcomed and stayed there, but then the more I visited Blue Gate the more I felt like I really liked the women there too, and wanted to hang out their a bit more. Um and so I think I just ended up staying there.

Did people mix much, at the different gates?

Yes. Apart from like I say there was this bit of a split between Yellow Gate and the rest of the camp.

Do you remember how long, in your mind, that went on for?

Um, it's really hard to know. I don't know - sorry. Have you had other people talk much about that?

Yeah, yeah. Yes, it's definitely come up - I think it was really difficult at the time.

Yeah, and again it's a thing where - I don't wish anything was different, but if I could have gone there with an older person's head, I wish I could understand it a bit more. What happened and what was going on - as opposed to just accepting what I was being told and this being just a bit of a this is how it is thing.

Well there's a lot of different perspectives on it, as well, isn't there?

Um (agrees).

So it's hard to even know a definitive answer when there's so many different views.

Yeah, yeah. And some of it. I'm all for flat hierarchies and stuff, but I think some of it is in the power vacuum of a non-hierarchical structure it creates a space for personalities and egos - I'm sure mistakes were on all sides, and it's a shame that there was a bit of a split, and I hope that isn't focused on or take away - I don't think it does take away.

I don't think it does at all.

Not now, with the passing of the decades, I don't think it does take away.

No, because there's so much amazing work alongside that - from everybody, and like as you said even while that split was happening you were having the most amazing political epiphanies.

Yes, and I think really at the end of the day we just...

Which was set up by those women...

...yeah, and I think we were all just doing things in our own way, and probably everyone had a lot of stuff (laughs)! There was a lot of stuff going on for everybody. There was a lot of mental health stuff, there was a lot of learning how to do things.

Did you find that a lot of women came to Greenham to escape sexual violence?

Yeah. Yes, definitely. I think it's just the nature of it. I wouldn't know how much directly to escape sexual violence, but definitely people came to Greenham who'd run away, or were run away, or were escaping relationships and then either consciously or later on realised that they were into women, or that they were in unhealthy relationships with men, and there was a lot of people with mental health problems there.

And how does that - do you think that's maybe affected your choices in terms of helping in that field - working in that field now?

I think I was - I from very young wanted to be a teacher, and then a social worker, I think I've always had that in me that I wanted to do some kind of helping type thing, but definitely that also informs what I do now. Just like living with people with mental problems and it being really quite normal, so you know - there was Metal Micky - Carol, who wore spark plugs, who was there because she was in love with the vehicles, not because she believed in our - I'm sure you've heard of her! She was quite connected with Southampton women, and Southampton women did quite a lot to help her, and look after her when Greenham ended, because there was no way she could integrate into so called 'normal society'. And there were other women, who you know - looking back on it now - had psychotic symptoms and stuff, and I think people were looked after and accepted for who they were.

Wow.

Quite well, but for sure that's really challenging if there's someone who is a little psychotic, um, nothing dangerous happened to my knowledge, but I just mean how women presented was not always easy or straightforward. But yeah, that sort of - that kind of how Greenham was full of random women from all over the place with all kinds of stuff going on - presenting in all kinds of ways - that was all normal. So I guess that did inform me working in mental health, and particularly when I teach yoga now on psychiatric wards or mental health wards, nothing fazes me (laughs)!

Yeah.

Everything and everything either is or isn't normal - it's all just human behaviour, and it's fascinating how people's minds work. You know, politics is fascinating, personalities is fascinating, how we interact - the dynamics, the psychology, it's all just really fascinating to me.

Yeah, wow wow, that was brilliant - thank you so much.

Thank you.

It's really fascinating to hear such a different take on things as well, and a different gate. It was really interesting.