

Maria Ragusa

So maybe we should start at the beginning, and how you got to be involved in the peace movement?

Well, I was um, when I was living in the Midlands - in Tamworth in Staffordshire, a very close friend of mine Jade was involved in the initial march at Greenham.

From Wales?

From Wales. And then she subsequently went to live at Violet Gate and um, I went to visit her, basically - although I was interested, I'd done lots of work with CND and things like that, and I was very interested both in feminism and in the Greenham common thing. And although I had a full time job, I would spend weekends there and holidays, so that's how - that's how I got to be involved. And I was a self defence instructor at the time..

Oh were you?

Women's self defence had been fiercely opposed by both the police and the British Martial Arts Association at the time, but a group of us had got together and got support from the ILEA and the GLC, none of - they don't exist now, but anyway they'd funded us, and I was in the first wave of women to be trained as women's self defence instructors. And so when I went to Greenham, I actually ran, um, self defence sessions for the women there.

Oh wow, right okay.

And I had to run two kinds of sessions - one was a sort of - straight forward stuff, and then a special session for Quaker women, because of-course they don't believe in any kind of violence, so all the techniques that I showed, her to be, what we call non-violent defensive techniques. So that's what I was doing there, really.

Could you tell us a bit like about your experience with that? Like any particularly striking memories from teaching the women?

Well Jade and I had both been involved in Tamworth in setting up um, women's self - a women's refuge.

Right, okay.

We'd actually been um part of a pressure group of about five of us, and we'd manage to persuade the local council to set up, um, a refuge for women who had been victims of domestic violence, so I got involved in the whole business about how to counter violence, um and I thought the most effective way was self defence because I think and I think research has shown it does work in that women who do defend themselves are less likely to be injured or killed. Although that was contested by the police at the time. Although now the police are now in support of the women doing...

How did that relate to NVDA, though?

Well this was a big question really, and when I came to Greenham that was posed to me on a number of occasions, but you know we don't, you know a lot of women felt quite strongly that they didn't want to use violence even to defend themselves. Um, and I respected that - you know that's why I did separate groups...

Sessions?

Yeah. I mean obviously there is self defence where you learn how to strike an attacker to get them away from you, so that you can run away.

Of-course, yeah.

But there are also lots of non-violent ways of getting out of groups, protecting yourself - this kind of thing, which I could do for them.

So did you teach them in like quite large groups - was this?

Um, usually about groups of eight or nine - not huge groups, and also we were filmed.

Were you?

Yes. I mean the army filmed this, so I presume that somewhere they were probably thinking I was some sort of dangerous revolutionary teaching...

Did they ask you if they could film you?

No no, no - they just took photographs and filmed it.

Right. And did you know that at the time - that they'd done that?

It was clear to me that that was what was happening. You know, and I just thought fine - because there had been some attacks on women at the camp, and that was the reason - what to do in the case of attack.

So when were you there, when did you go there?

Well it's difficult for me to say exactly every time, so what I did is I unfortunately I was a bit of, I didn't keep diaries all the time, but I think I found 1982 - the first entry, which was the 21st March 1982 - 'Got the coach to Greenham common, a really damp, grey day. Greenham common is a really dreary hostile place, barbed wire, grey buildings, police. The camps outside reminded me of films about what things would be like after the Holocaust'. I meant a nuclear holocaust - 'not a bad omen, I hope', so that was - and then I went back the same day - so that was my first visit to Greenham common.

And that was?

That was 1982. 1982. So that would have been my first visit.

So were you there before Embrace the Base? That's quite close to that, isn't it?

Um, I can't remember.

Okay.

I can't remember all the occasions I went there - sometimes I didn't record it in my diaries.

So you didn't live there, you were -sort of.

Yes, I had a full time job - I was a college lecturer, and I didn't leave my job, unlike some of the women there. But um, I think it was very - I mean I made a considerable effort to give up my weekends to go there.

So did you go every weekend?

Um I went quite a few times. I also I think in 1984 I actually spent my Christmas - my whole Christmas, or part of it, so, where is it? Here we go - Christmas at Greenham, so I actually went on the 24th, on Christmas Eve, um 'Set my tent up and went to the pub' - there was one pub in Newbury that would allow Greenham women in.

Do you remember what that was called?

Yes, I think the Rock-bee, Roke-a-bee, R-O-K-E-B-Y.

And none of the others would allow you in?

No, there was - a lot of opposition in Newbury against the camps and I think some of it was that it was unhygienic, it was dirty, we were undesirables. Unfortunately when you went into the town even if you dressed nicely they would know you were from the camp because you smelt of wood smoke, and that was - and I mean, I'm a sociologist, so I'm kind of interested in these things - I remember going into a baker's shop to buy some bread, for the women at the base, and um I asked for 'x' number of roles, and the woman serving a) she didn't like to look at me, and when I tended her the money she said 'can you put the money down on the counter?'. So I put my money down on the counter, and then she got me my roles, and she put them on the counter, she didn't put them in my hand, and then I tended my hand for the change, and she put the change down on the counter, so she wouldn't actually touch me.

Wow.

And I thought oh my god, that's a touch taboo - right there, a touch taboo, which normally you only see in a caste system with the untouchables - the idea that you get contamination through touch with somebody. And although I smelt of woodsmoke, I didn't look like I had some horrible contagious disease. And the same thing happened when I went to the bus station to get the bus back to London - I got there quite early and I sat there quite early waiting for the coach, and then a whole load of other people not from the camp came, and none of them would sit on the bench next to me. So what I did was I went and sat on the pavement, because I could see that some of these people were elderly, and probably needed to sit down, and sure enough as soon as I went and sat on the pavement they all went and sat on the bench, and I thought that's really interesting there, because I had the status of an untouchable.

Yeah, when you were there did you notice - how long did you stay there, by the way?

That particular time - the Christmas time...

How long were you visiting for?

Um, probably only 4 or 5 days at that time.

So you finished in 1984?

I haven't found any - I think I continued to go, but I haven't found any written accounts. I mean these are the only written accounts I've found, so they're the only ones I can be absolutely certain of. On Christmas Day itself, this is 1984, it rained - I got rather wet. I walked around the whole base, which is a 9 mile perimeter, with a couple of people.

And why did you do that - do you remember?

I think there was a sort of a sense that when you went to Greenham, that was something to do.

Right okay.

You walk round the whole base.

To keep you warm? And you notice...

It keeps you warm, and also at each gate there's a camp, so you kind of say hello 'Oh hi, I'm staying at Violet Gate, how are you?' - you know, and then - although (laughs), you know Violet Gate was...

Was that where you were?

That was where my friend Jade lived, and so that's where I went to visit, and Violet Gate was um - every gate had its own flavour, and Violet Gate was known as the 'right off' gate.

Right off!

Right off - we were all right offs, because some of us might wear make up...

Eat meat...

We might eat meat...

Sleep with men!

Sleep with men, whatever, so that was the right off gate, so if you went round and said 'Hi, I'm from Violet Gate', it was like 'who are you?' (Laughs), 'what kind of right-off-ness have you got?', but I mean no - I'm exaggerating.

No, a few people have said that about Violet Gate actually, but they've said it in a humorous way in that they were there.

Yes.

Because it was hardcore whatever gate you were at, really.

Yes. And I quite liked that anyway, I don't sort of necessarily want to be right-on.

Did you stay at Violet Gate the whole time, or did you...

Yes, I - every time I went, because my friend was there. She initially went to Indigo, and then she moved to Violet, I'm not quite sure why.

I don't know very much about Indigo, what was...

No, I have a - let's see, I've got a card from her...yeah, she initially went to Indigo Gate - this is 1984, she was going to Greenham regularly, but in 1984 she went there permanently, so you know, this is from Indigo - 'I had a really warm welcome from everyone at Indigo, I feel very much a part of the family when I'm here. Spent the morning in court with some women from camp, one was sent down, which is a real downer. We were kept awake for much of last night by the guards playing radios full blast, walking up and down...'

Was that deliberate?

Yes. 'Car horns, otherwise everything is okay. Peace and love'. So there we are, she was in Indigo, then she very quickly moved to Violet, and I have some letters here which mention some of the events which happened when she was there - telling me about them, so that's something you might want to read?

Yeah, that would be really interesting.

So it's basically through her.

Is that lady still alive?

Yeah, she lives in London.

Would she be okay for us to look at those letters.

Well I should think so as long as it's just the bits about Greenham.

Yeah. Well did you want to read out the bits about Greenham, and then you can have privacy.

Yes, certainly. Right, so this is the 18th January 1985, um 'we are relocated to Red Gate for a short spell, as Esmeralda broke down here' - that was the van they used, Esmeralda, 'after a recent eviction, and rather than push her all the way back to Violet we simply stayed. But we are due to get a new van today, I wonder what she'll be like. Last night was supposed to have the worst blizzard for 40 years. I don't know about that, but it did snow quite a lot,' - I mean I was there in snow as well, and I remember the cold was unbelievable. 'We brought a communal bender, and all seven of us slept in it, so it was incredibly warm and cozy. It was amazing to wake up this morning to so much white everywhere, it's really beautiful. It's really funny - we were going to fry some eggs this morning for breakfast, but when we went to crack them we found they were frozen inside, so we had to melt them in the frying pan to cook them. Anyway, you know what it's like so I'll leave it at that about camp' - and then she goes on about other things. And again in November of '84, so prior to that letter she's at Violet Gate, 'Just a short line to say hi. Life here is as usual - regularly evictions of-course. Yesterday they were really heavy, Blue Gate was done three times, and everywhere else to times. Blue Gate were really pissed off, after the third eviction they erected a barricade and made flaming torches, but then of-course the bailiffs didn't come back, typical. But today is really peaceful and nice. There's only myself and one other here at the moment and I'm writing letters and she's knitting. The birds are getting very friendly, and one's come up almost to my boot a few minutes ago. A number of support groups have got together and they're operating a meals-on-wheels service for us, which is wonderful. Basically they have a mini van which comes round to all the gates Monday to Friday to bring us hot food. Yesterday when we had all those evictions and then it rained, and got dark about 5, we practically leapt on them with cries of joy, we were so pleased to see them. So although evictions and things are a bit rough at the moment, the support we're getting is wonderful. It's funny that although a lot of individual support has passed from us to the miners,' - because it was the miners at the time, 'the groups that do help us are really sticking to it, and being really consistent in their support.' So anyway, that's what she's...

You must have been very young when you were there?

No, I'm - I wasn't, I'm 65 now.

Oh right, so how old were you?

Let's see, 1984 - was born in '53, '63,' 73 - I was 30 something, I was in my 30s so I wasn't really young at all.

You look very young.

Thank you. Not really very young at all.

So when you went, were there sacrifices that you had to make in your life, I mean did you have children?

No, absolutely no sacrifices apart from sacrificing my comfort - I have never been so bloody cold.

Yeah, so could you tell us about that? Those winters - like how you coped?

Well you basically put on everything you had - whether it was clothing or not, I mean you just piled....

Presumably you got illnesses from that as well?

Well I must have been quite tough, because I don't remember getting any illnesses from it, but the awful thing was having - I used to have to unfreeze the zip of my tent with a lighter before I could unzip my tent to go out and have a pee - in the snow - you know, behind a bush, and that was, that was miserable. And of-course you know you just manage to get a little bit of warmth together, and then you know, suddenly you're freezing cold again, because you've had to go out for a pee or something. So yeah, the cold was terrible, but I mean we used to get up very early and make a fire. One of the stupid things about the evictions that I was reading to you about, was when the bailiffs came - you had to have your tent all packed up, because if it - anything - anything that touched the ground they would put into a machine that shredded it up. And unfortunately the other things that they would take and shred was any fire wood, anything, they would throw water on your fire, anything that was...

What were your experiences with them - do you remember them coming and...?

Well they seemed to be, I mean they weren't unpleasant to us, but it was just like they were jobsworths - it as just like 'this is what we've been told to do', and you know - they'd be saying, 'oh we're having the fire wood as well', and you'd think we're only going to go and pick some more, you know, this kind of thing, but they took no notice - they didn't communicate - not when I was there, anyway.

So there was always this sense of having to pack up?

Constantly. You couldn't get comfortable because you knew you were going to pack it all up the next day.

What did you sleep on?

I slept on a bit of foam rubber, on a sleeping bag, and then I'd pile everything else on top of me.

Did you have a bender?

No, I had a tent. I brought a tent with me. But the person I remember best - part from my friend Jade who was living at Violet Gate - was an elderly lady called Elizabeth - who was amazing, and she slept in a bender, she just had a piece of plastic tarpaulin...

Over a branch, yeah.

And she would get up at 5 o'clock every morning, go and collect fire wood and make a fire, so that when the rest of us got up we...

I feel like somebody has told me about her, yeah.

And on the Christmas there, 1984, um, on Christmas Day (laughs), when I got back from walking around base she was there - oh no, that's right, before I set off she was there in the van, and she had made - because she didn't live that far away from Greenham common, she had made about 300 mince pies. And I said to her 'My god, who's going to eat all this?' And she said 'oh, I'm taking it for the soldiers in the base'.

Yes, we've heard about this - was she also called Blue? Or is that someone else?

I never heard her called that - she was an elderly lady. Anyway we said 'How are you going to get them into the base?' And she said 'Oh, I'll just drive in', so she drove in and because it was Christmas Day and they had the relatives going in all the time, they thought she was a relative. And apparently she went into the canteen and started distributing her mince pies to American soldiers going 'peace and love'. Anyway they brought her back, and when I got back from my walk they were just bringing her back, and they said 'we think this is yours' you know I said 'you're not arresting her then?' 'Well no, given that it's Christmas Day and she's 104, no.' Anyway I said to Elizabeth 'what are you going to do now?', and she said 'oh, I'll just go back in', and I said 'you can't drive in, they've got the number of your...you don't want them to confiscate your car', and she said 'oh no, I'm not going to drive in', and I

said 'what are you going to do?', and she reached into the boot of her car and pulled out the most enormous set of bolt cutters I've ever seen in my life, and she said 'I'm going to cut my way in!' (Laughs). And she did just that!

I think she made a real impression on people.

She was indomitable.

I think a few people have mentioned her actually.

Quite batty, but indomitable, bless her. I don't know what happened to her, but she certainly made an impression on me, and I was very grateful that she made those fires - so that we had something hot to sit around in the mornings, because that was, that was...

Yeah, so in terms of the camp being women only. Were you there - you probably weren't there for those discussions, were you - that would have happened earlier than '82. So by the time you were there...

Oh men would come during the day.

Yeah...

It was very common, in-fact I probably came with them. My second visit to Greenham in 1982, um, here we go, so 'Greenham common' - this is just a day visit on Sunday 12th December - 'Amazing, very moving to see what the women had decorated the perimeter with - baby clothes, photos and so on, there must have been about twenty five thousand women and eight thousand men', so...

Yeah, they weren't allowed to stay though, were they - the men?

No, no, they didn't stay the night. 'Walked around the mud, sang, held candles, lovely atmosphere.' So there you go - um...

What were your feelings about it being women only?

I thought it was a good idea that it was women only at night, because I'd been to Molesworth camp, no I didn't stay overnight at Molesworth, but I had heard that there'd been rapes.

Right.

Now whether or not that was men staying at the peace camp or outsiders, I don't know, but I felt that it was safer for it to be women only after a certain time.

Do you remember what the time was that they left?

Usually after dark.

Right.

I mean, if there was a man there after dark, you'd say 'Who are you, and what are you doing here? I think you need to leave because it's gone dark'.

What was the importance of that space to you - aside from the safety - did it have a sort of psychological impact on you?

What, women only?

Yeah, that sense of..

Oh, well yes - I mean I'd kind of learnt about the importance of women only spaces through the work I'd done with Women's Aid.

Yeah, yeah.

Women only self defence courses. Jade and I were both in a consciousness raising group, which of-course was single sex, and we learnt at that time - I would say that it was quite important to have women only experiences, because the presence of men can affect how women interact.

Do you still believe that should be...

Um...

Prioritised - because it's under threat now, isn't it?

Probably - it depends.

It was always under threat really, wasn't it.

The first women's group I was in was in 1974, and that was when I was in a women's group which was made up of women and men, and it was a pressure group for changing the law, because at the time the law had yet to be changed about sex

discrimination, equal pay, and so forth. And so I would say that the women's group I was in - it wasn't called a women's group, it was called a pressure group for equality - you know, and they had men in that as well. And the debates were largely to do with what's the next action we're going to do to try to push forward? And I mean the equal pay act got passed the following year.

Did you align yourselves with a particular strain of feminism then, and do you do that now?

I suppose I come from a socialist perspective, so I kind of had that slight sort of, slant to it, but when I lived in London I got involved in WAVAW, or Women Against Violence Against Women, which is a much more radical group and very separatist, so that was a bit more of a struggle for me, because I felt that somehow seeing men as the enemy wasn't the answer. I mean sexism is the enemy - not people, you know. And sexism - I think, sexism affects men as well as it affects women, and there was a whole, there was something in London at the time called Radical Drag, which was groups of men exploring how sexism affected them, um, and what it was to be a man, and there was a whole bunch of stuff around that. And I was very interested to see how perceptions of gender straight-jacketed people.

Yeah.

You know, and how - I became very conscious of how it had straight-jacketed me when I was younger.

How did you feel it had straight-jacketed you?

Well I grew up in the '50s.

That's enough, isn't it!

And er, you know, I remember thinking at a very early age 'damn, I should have been born a boy', because I did not like the idea of getting married and having kids and being a housewife, which was what was presented to us - I didn't want to do that, and I knew that from a very early age, and then in my teens and coming up to my twenties, I had a lot of dreams where I was a man.

Right.

They weren't sexual dreams, but I...

Identity dreams.

They were identity dreams - I was a man in those dreams, and it wasn't until I became a feminist that those dreams disappeared, because then of-course I realised that just because I was a woman didn't mean I couldn't do x, y and z. You know. Um, I would say probably in the 1980s I also went through a phase of changing my appearance quite a lot - I used to wear men's suits, I had very short hair, this kind of thing. Um because I was rejecting - I think I was rejecting what society said it was to be a woman, but I kind of worked through that, and now I'm really, really happy about being a woman. And again I don't see any particular - I mean you can't say half the population are your enemy, that's ridiculous. I mean it's sexism that's the enemy, not men. So that's where I'm coming from - I don't know if that's explained it?

No, that's very useful. In terms of actions that you took, and things like that, were you ever arrested?

No, um, I was very aware that I didn't want to be arrested, because I didn't want to have to - I was worried about getting a criminal record in terms of my job because I was...

Would that have impacted on your job?

Well yes, if you're a teacher you have to declare these things. And when you're - as was CRB, it's a DBS now, you have to declare any criminal activity.

So how did you manage not getting arrested, then?

Er, well I didn't break into the base, I didn't go into - that was they generally prosecuted - they didn't prosecute you for demonstrating or singing or any of that, but I didn't go into the base.

Were you ever manhandled by the police?

Yes, I mean I remember on one occasion a policeman on horseback backed his horse into me, which was - and it was a big horse as well - and I was kind of pinned up against the fence - the barbed wire - well not barbed wire, the wire fence - and he shouted at me 'Move out the way', and I just very calmly said 'well if you move your gee-gee, I will'. You know, um, yeah I mean I tried to - you know I didn't confront the police, I just stayed out their way because of this, and I understand that a lot of women if you like were brave enough, or in a position to break the law, or as you heard - go through courts and so forth. Um, but I...

Presumably you were responsible for yourself financially then?

Yes.

So the risk would have been higher.

Oh yes, and also I mean - because I was a self defence instructor and a teacher, I felt that my responsibility was to my students as well - you have to think about that as well - if I'd been inside or prosecuted or whatever, you know, that would have been letting them down in some way, so I didn't see necessity to do that. I mean I think I would have done if there'd been, I mean if I'd seen a policeman attacking somebody, I would have waded in to defend her, but I never saw that.

Did you see any acts of violence from police or MOD...

No.

...or any figures of authority, or men generally?

No what I did see, which was amazing was sitting around the campfire probably when I was staying there for several days, and it was nighttime, and a couple of men approached the campfire, and I thought ooh, what do they want? Because they looked quite tough young men - short hair and so forth. And one of the women sitting there said 'Oh, it's so and so and Tim and John, or something', and I looked at her and said 'Oh my god, who are they?' She said 'They're soldiers, they're the soldiers that were on guard a couple of weeks ago, and I got talking to them'. She said 'come and have a cup of tea', so they came and sat down and we gave them tea, and they were perfectly placid, and she sort of looked at them, and she said 'Which side of the fence do you like the best, then?' And one of them said 'it costs a lot of money to buy yourself out of the army'.

Oh right.

Yeah, and in-fact that particular woman, and I won't mention names because she actually - one of the soldiers, she got very friendly with him, and he absconded from the army, and they ran away together.

Right. And did you have any romantic relationships at camp?

No, no I didn't. I mean I had a partner back home, so no. But I would say that my - I mean my friendship with Jade is very, very strong - we're still friends, so these are enduring friendships, and these people matter a lot to me.

Are you in touch with other people apart from..

A couple, yes. So these things are important. No, I didn't have any sexual relationships, but I had friendships which meant something.

And how did - did you observe other people's sexual and romantic relationships at camp, and how they managed being in that level of close quarters, being under that level of pressure together? Did you observe any of that kind of stuff?

Well, I know of one person who had been in a heterosexual relationship, and then met someone at Greenham and realised what her sexuality was. The actual details of what people did, or whatever, I wasn't party to.

Because some people have reported friendship circles being challenged by relationships - fracturing and that kind of thing.

Oh I didn't notice that - that was outside of my...I mean you have to understand I kind of went there with an idea of I'm going to do self defence, and I'm going to be - you know, I want to participate in this. I wasn't too concerned about the interactions that were going on, too much.

Did you have like, organisational duties in the day - as a visitor, or did you turn up for actions?

Both, but no, I wasn't given any instructions or things to do, but you could see what needed doing, and you'd volunteer it you'd say 'oh, I think I'll go and collect some more firewood', or 'right, I'm going to go into town, does anybody need anything?' You kind of - well I made myself useful as best I could.

Yeah.

What I had to realise, as someone who didn't live there all the time, as women who lived there all the time didn't have any privacy, so it wasn't okay to just go up and start talking to somebody. Because if you understand we have - at home - we have walls, if you don't want to talk to anybody, that's not an issue - we can just stay at home and be on our own, or if we live with other people we can go to our bedroom and say 'right, I need some space', and you have privacy. When you live at Greenham common, you're constantly on show. Um, so you have to create a space - a private space for yourself in your mind.

Right, that's interesting.

And having people breaking into that can feel unpleasant. And I think a lot of people who visited just for a few hours or something weren't aware of that, and they'd say 'ooh, these Greenham women aren't always very friendly', because they'd just go up and barge up to someone and say 'oh, why are you here?', and then you know - this person may be - you know, in her private thoughts or whatever, and she's not choosing to communicate at that time, you know you don't want to become public property, I think.

Yeah. Did you feel aware of the media presence?

Not personally. No. No, I didn't feel aware of that. I don't know - certainly never had an encounter with anybody from the media - that I know of.

Yes. Okay, what about kind of conflict resolution - were you aware of any of that? I heard that Greenham women didn't vote on things, they tended to discuss and take a more lateral approach to running the camp, rather than hierarchical structure, and I'm just wondering did you observe any kind of decisions about actions, or anything really - organisational decisions - did you notice any conflict and how they went about resolving that without the hierarchical structure of 'I'm the leader' and 'you do what I'm saying' kind of thing?

No. I'm afraid I wasn't a party to that. I was very much aware that as a kind of non-permanent member of Greenham common, it wasn't really my place to get involved in those things, and I was happy with that. I was often - I'll give you an example, because there was the unfortunate death of Dee Sainsbury?

Yeah.

Now that happened when I was there, and I've got a record of something that I've said about that. (Looks for papers). Sorry...

It's okay, take your time.

I know what it says, anyway when I - they had a memorial for Dee Sainsbury at Blue Gate, and I said I would stay back at Violet Gate and keep an eye on the fire and stuff while the others went off - not because I didn't want to go to the memorial, but because I felt that was helpful, and that was more important for me to do that than to go off and participate in something which - I hadn't known Dee personally, so that gives you an idea. I didn't feel that I lived at Greenham common...

Yeah, just for the purposes of the people listening, could you talk about the Dee Sainsbury thing?

I can't remember the details - all I have is my diary entry to say that there as a memorial for Dee at Blue Gate and I chose to stay back and look after the camp, and that's all I have. So the other details of what happened with Dee, um are kind of a bit hazy, and I'm not confident. Sorry.

That's alright. I'm just wondering about - in terms of the threat of nuclear, and when you compare it to the threat of nuclear today, what are your thoughts about that?

I think people forget how at the time, in certainly from about the 1960s and through the '70s, the nuclear threat was very, very real to us. I remember even at sixth form college we were shown a film about what could happen if there was a nuclear war and all the rest of it, and they showed people taking suicide pills, and all the horrors that happened - what happened to your body. It was just - and I came out of there in floods of tears, and I think nuclear devastation - the nuclear holocaust became a metaphor on which we projected all kinds of things, and um. Interestingly for me, through having done some primal therapy - I don't know if you know what that is?

I don't know what that is.

Well there are techniques to get you back to very early experiences, and you can relive very early experiences. And I had been feeling really terrified about the prospect of nuclear war, and I came to my therapy session and I reported that - I said 'I'm very, very worried about nuclear - the bomb', and the therapist said to me 'what does that feel like?' And I said 'Like a huge shadow falling over us, that we can't escape from', and then the therapist said 'How has your body been feeling?' And I said 'well absolutely fine, apart from a really bad pain in my ankles, which I cannot understand because there's nothing wrong with them'. So I was asked to lie down, and the therapist said 'Just let your body do what it wants', and immediately my legs were jerked up into the air, and I was doing essentially a shoulder stand, and feeling an absolute shock, and I came out of it, and the therapist said 'what was that - what did you feel?' I said 'suddenly I was - I got this pain in my ankles, I was jerked up by my feet and there was this huge shadow fell over me - I couldn't get away.' 'Interesting, that's exactly the same words you used about the bomb'. Well I worked out - I was born by Caesarean section - at a time when the woman would not have been awake, so I was pulled out by my feet and then dumped into a crib for 5 or 6 hours until my mother had recovered - had been sewn up.

Is that what had happened - it had been that long, would it?

Uum (agrees).

Wow, I didn't know that.

So I think - obviously I was holding this terrible fear of the terrible separation that I experienced, and the shock that I experienced of my actual birth, and I think - it's such a powerful metaphor, the whole thing about nuclear devastation, the end of everything, um, I'd been projecting that experience of being born onto that. Because after that session my fear abated somewhat, and I spoke to a couple of women at Greenham about this - the fear of the bomb and so on, and one of them was saying that she night after night after night had been having dreams about nuclear devastation and the dreams had stopped when she'd come to live at Greenham common. You know she said 'You faced that thing head on, and the fear goes because you've taken some control'.

And how do you feel the - what do you feel about it now, the threat of nuclear war now?

I think it's been superseded by um, certainly as a theme in the media it's been superseded by the threat of global warming.

Right.

Also you know it's kind of, in a way is bigger. You know, and um, I think we're being told that it's not about control I think that message is coming across loud and clear - it's not, of-course, but the way the system is, is that no-one has the responsibility, so it just continues. I hope something happens to stop it, but um - nuclear war...it's such a huge thing to confront, um I kind of - after Greenham common I think I gradually became a more and more absorbed into doing self defence - that became my prime...

I was going to ask you what you felt your personal legacies were?

Empowerment - empowerment of women. I think to empower women, or to empower anybody is vital. Um, for people to have a sense that they can do something.

And how did that manifest itself into your life- aside from the self defence?

Hhm, well for many years I taught critical thinking.

Ah right, okay.

Which interestingly enough this government took off the syllabus. (Laughs). Oh yeah, um, yes and um I don't teach self defence anymore because regulations say

because I haven't got a City and Guilds in it - in Sports Science, I can't teach self defence (laughs). You're going to bureaucratise out of it, er, and so well what do I do now? (Sighs).

Are you quite politically active now?

No, I don't think I'd call myself politically active, I support things initiatives like the Free University - I give my time to teach...

That is quite political in a sense.

...because I think its important for people to have education.

University fees are so high.

Also, I play to my strengths - I'm a good educator, so that's what I do, do you see what I mean?

Yeah.

As far as changing the world goes, or stopping nuclear war or global warming, I think there's a limit - I have my limits there, but at-least I can educate.

Yeah. And do you feel that younger people know enough about Greenham? Do you feel they know anything about it - the younger generations? What would be your perception of that?

I can't answer for other people, I'm sorry.

I mean what age groups do you teach?

Mainly adults.

Oh, mainly adults.

Yeah, or 16 and above, um.

If you said to some of your 16 year olds 'do you know what Greenham common is', what would they say?

I don't know, but I am - I was quite surprised that, generations used to be 20-30years long, now a generation is 10 years.

Yeah, yeah.

And this became apparent to me, I mean I'm retired, but when I was teaching that age group, and I would mention things like The Beatles, I would be met with incomprehension, 'Who? What? What Beatles, what? I said 'The pop group', 'I haven't heard of them'.

It's pretty common that younger generations really don't know about Greenham.

No.

Do you feel, I mean in what way could we improve that knowledge do you feel, and why do you feel that gap in knowledge has happened for younger generations in such a hugely important campaign - like it was one of the biggest campaigns in European history.

Well it hasn't been included in any syllabus.

What would be your feeling about why that is?

Well one would be tempted to say it's not in the government's interest (laughs) to put something like that not the syllabus, but I don't know, because I think it's probably not as um, as sinister as that, I think what's happened is that education has progressively gone down the line of passing - you know, passing exams, league tables, ticking the boxes. I mean the whole area of education and health has been infected with what I call 'quantaphrenia'.

What's...

Quantaphrenia is the need to quantify everything - to turn everything into statistics, and of-course a lot of what happens in education isn't quantifiable - I mean raising awareness is to quantifiable, it's an organic process.

And do you feel that the impact of Greenham was quantifiable?

No, I don't.

What do you feel the impact was?

Well I can only talk about the impact of it on myself, and on people I've spoken to, um certainly raising awareness - it did that.

Yeah.

I think it empowered women. I think the campaign that was linked to it, which was Cruise Watch did have an impact, I think, because that was probably a little bit more threatening - to have people actually watching the movement of cruise missiles around the country. I mean a lot of people thought a bunch of women sitting around a base was not very effective - especially as it was non-violent.

Yeah.

But I think it was certainly worth doing.

Do you feel that it had an effect on our relationship in the UK with nuclear arms? Do you feel that it had..

Well I do think it had an international impact - it became known, and peace camps proliferated. I mean this diary here - lists and lists of all the peace camps - it's not just Greenham. Greenham I think was, if you like, singled out because it was a women only thing, and that was unusual and that's what the media focused on, but there were plenty of other peace camps, and I think they came about partly as a result of Greenham. The idea that you could protest against something like that. Is that okay?

Yeah, no that's really interesting to hear your perspective on it.

It's all I can say, really.

In terms of the media, do you remember much of how the media affected women on camp? Some of it was so awful, wasn't it?

Um, do you know although I taught sociology for many years, and I had to teach the affect of media - largely because of that, I am very careful with what I choose to put in my head, and I do not read newspapers, I do not watch the news on TV, you know I listen to the news headlines on Radio 4, and I've been like that for a long time, because just as you wouldn't eat rubbish, I don't want to put rubbish into my head.

Yes.

Because I know that it just upsets me and makes me angry, and it's kind of an impotent fury. The media distorts dramatically, and I've chosen to - I mean I can critique it - if you give me a newspaper report I can sit there and critique it, I'm not

stupid. And I do have a sense of what's going on, but I tend to throw up my hands in horror at how most media reports most things, so I don't look at it.

Yeah.

You know, why wind yourself up?

Yeah.

There's enough to be getting on with. I'm very much into - that's one of the reasons why I didn't want to stay in WAVAW for too long, because I thought Women Against Violence Against Women was a campaign based on hate. It was very, very much to do with anger and hate. And I understand that - I understand campaigns that are based on that, but for me personally that's not useful. And I thought if you're angry about violence against women, teach self defence, you know - railing against films that depict women as victims, fine, whatever but it's so negative - it's always negative, it's always 'we object, we hate this, we hate that', and to me that's not necessarily a way forward - for me.

And do you think that's what drew you towards Greenham - that sort of positive action?

Yes, yes, and also that - I mean there was an awful lot of communication, we absolutely made it, certainly at Violet Gate you made it a policy to always try to talk to anybody that was to do with the police, the military - communicate with them. It was called Subversion by Tea!

(Laughs)

Give them a cup of tea, give them a little bun or something, and then have a little chat with them about...

And did you do that?

Sometimes, I'd say 'well, what do you think about this, then?' 'Oh I think it's pointless.' 'Oh, okay then, so that's interesting, what do you think should happen? Are you for nuclear war, do you think it's a good idea? How would you feel about us using a nuclear weapon against another country with the possibility they might retaliate? What do you think about that?' I think that's the way forward, really. That's not to say I haven't done my fair share of shouting and formulating against things.

If you had a real go-to memory of Greenham that you could, really sort of - in your mind picture, what would it be?

Gosh, there's loads.

Feel free to give loads, that's fine.

I think the importance of the fire - the importance of those fires that - making a fire, and it really brings home probably for thousands and thousands of years, that's what human beings did. You know, you build a fire, you sit around the fire, and then you talk, or you eat, or you interact around a fire, and there's something about that that is just so basic and so important, so I think, and how awful it was that the bailiffs tried to - they'd even evict comfortable looking stones that you might sit on.

You're joking?

No, no no.

Where did they put them?

In their van or something.

They stuck a stone in a van - wow.

Yeah - 'That's a comfortable looking stone, they might sit on that', you know, or some item that you could sit on - everything, and that was ridiculous. So that's the fireside of thing is an abiding memory, the cold is an abiding memory. I think walking around the perimeter was quite an important thing for me to do - to get a measure of what was happening, you know. And the strong sense of the, the absolute contrast between the culture on one side of the fence, and the culture that existed inside.

Yeah.

Female - largely male. Non-hierarchical - supremely hierarchical. And also whenever there was a lorry load of American soldiers that went past, they all looked the other way, and I asked about this and somebody told me, because she had a sister that was going out with a GI, so she got some sort of inside knowledge about it - I can't vouch for it though - but the American soldiers had been told not to look at us.

Right.

And that we were dangerous.

There were rumours that women's conversations were recorded as well - did you know anything about that?

Um, well I certainly got filmed teaching self defence, I would think they probably recorded it audio-ly as well, me saying 'oh this is what you have to do' and what have you.

And the zapping?

I heard about it, but I didn't experience it. I heard about it - you mean with the um, causing headaches.

Um (agrees).

Yes, I heard about it.

What did you feel about that - did you, because there were some people, well there were some people who were slightly sort of dubious about it, I suppose.

I don't have any personal experience of it, so I can't comment. But I don't see why they wouldn't give it a go (laughs).

There were studies done about the sort of radioactive leakage - obviously that happened at Aldermaston with all the children who had the increased cases of leukaemia, and there were some studies done, er about radioactive leakage at Greenham and women dying of obscure cancers and things.

Oh my god.

Well there wasn't any confirmation that it's definitely happened, but I wondered if you knew anything...

No, I didn't. That's the first I've heard. I'm sorry, I'm not very knowledgeable about the whole thing I'm afraid, I'm just giving you impressionistic...

No, no, it's been really detailed.

You know as far as historical evidence goes, it's pretty thin on the ground, really.