

**Mica May**

So, Mica, how did you come to be part of the peace movement?

**Accidentally! (Laughs). I was in the process of coming out as a lesbian, living in Manchester and um, a lot of the women that I knew in Manchester were very politicised, and I used to go along to, ah, what was it called - there was a bookshop, a radical left wing bookshop in Central Manchester, and through going there, and I don't think I actually attended any meetings at that stage, but er, I was talking to the woman who was working in the shop, and she must have told me about a meeting, and I went along to a meeting, and it was about Greenham more than it was actually about peace as a bigger thing, and that was how I got involved.**

And what year was that?

**1982.**

And had you heard of Greenham before that - or the rumblings of it, or was it right at the beginning?

**Um, it wasn't right at the beginning, it was it must have been the summer, so stuff had been going on there already for a little while. I'd heard a little bit, mainly again through the women's network at the time, in Manchester.**

Yeah. Are you from Manchester originally?

**No. I'm originally from near Birmingham, and I travelled around on a - mostly, I went from Birmingham to Manchester and that was where I came out. And after that I travelled around more.**

So that was how you heard about Greenham, was that also the first time that you went there?

**The first time that I went was on the Embrace the Base action. And I went on a coach of, I think it was all women and kids, that went down from Manchester.**

And how, what was it like? (Laughs).

**It was quite overwhelming, it was really exciting, and it was, we all got up really early in the morning so when you're doing something - you travel down in the coach altogether, that builds the feeling about it a lot. And so, yeah we were all getting**

really excited. It was a long way from Manchester, of-course, and um, then we got there and it was just - when we actually arrived - god I'm really trying to remember - it was like the place itself had somehow assumed this significance, and even though when you got there, and what you saw was disappointing in a way, because it was just a chain link fence, but of-course there were loads and loads of women, and loads of women arriving and dressed up, and embracing the base with all - holding hands and everything, and that feeling of being with so many other women doing the same thing together, and being absolutely convinced that it was the right thing to be doing made it really powerful. And I was - I was 24 and I'd just never been involved in anything like that before, and I'd always been a little bit of an outsider, and I made myself be funny, which is what most people - you either stay shy and be on the outskirts, or you be funny as a way in, really, and so that's what I did. But I never properly felt that I was part of something, but this was so big, and the women were so varied, there as no way you could not be within that group, which was lovely.

That's amazing.

It was lovely. And to feel that feeling of strength and camaraderie at the same time as knowing you were doing the right thing - goddess, heroine, it was all in one go, it was brilliant.

(Laughs). And did you stay there after Embrace the Base, or did you go back to Manchester?

No, we went back - it was a day trip, and it was after Christmas that the Manchester group - there was going to be a peace march in Manchester but nobody from Greenham would come and speak at the peace march, and having been there, I understand, because the number of requests all the time were so massive, and so people, and also people were prioritising being there, and the Manchester group said 'Well, every woman is a Greenham women, every woman is a Greenham woman, so somebody from here can go, stay there for a little while and come back and speak at the march.' So I said 'pick me, pick me!' I was very keen, and I was chosen. And er, so I went and I stayed for a week, and it was cold - there was snow, and I remember being, I could sleep with my hat on, and the place that I slept I had no sleeping bag, but somebody had given me a really lovely down sleeping bag - which is a bit rubbish when it's damp, which of-course it was. So that was - but there was this hotel, they called it the 'hotel' - there was a washing line, and the was pallets with straw on top, and loads of blankets, and everybody put their sleeping bags in there, so that's where I slept. But it was cold, because it was long, and it was only plastic over the top, so even less insulation than a tent, and then but I just had a fantastic time, and I got home and I went to my flat, and I got in the bath, and I had to have the window open because I was already claustrophobic being indoors in the house - after just a week!

**(Laughs). When I was in the bath with the steam, and er, but I was fairly clean when I went and said the speak - which I can't actually remember. I remember walking along in the march but I can't remember anything about speaking. But I can't remember if I stayed a couple of days at home, and then I went back off and that was it, but I didn't even unpack my flat - other people sorted my flat out for me, because that was it - I'd gone, I'd left, living at Greenham.**

And how long did you live at Greenham altogether?

**Six months. About, I think it was February when I moved, because that's when the march was, and in the August a group of us went off and travelled around Ireland in a Morris Minor van, and I was in that group so that was when I left.**

Was that '83?

**Yeah.**

And what gate were you at?

**I lived at the Yellow Gate, which at that time was known as the Main Gate because you haven't got...(inaudible) correct in that way.**

At that time did it have a set personality, or was there a message behind why you chose it, or was it just where you ended up?

**It was where I ended up. The only ones where there were people living there at the time when I moved there, there was Main Gate and what was already known as the Green Gate. But the Green Gate was called the Green Gate because it was in the woods, not because of there being any - the rainbow thing, which came later. And it was while I was living there some women went and set up on the other side and I think opened the Blue Gate, but there wasn't a great deal of choice. I used to go and visit the Green Gate, but I liked the buzz and the liveliness of what was happening at Main Gate, at the Yellow Gate.**

How old were you, did you say?

**I was 24. Yeah.**

And did you, so did you know anybody when you went down there, or did you just make friends?

**I did not know a soul.**

Were you scared?

**I was a bit intimidated. I remember during the week that I went people not being terribly friendly, and I mean they were friendly and welcoming, but they weren't properly friendly. And I didn't notice in so far as the difference between that and when I went back, and I remember somebody saying to me people say they are going to come back all the time, and people are coming and going, and that was definitely something that happened at the Yellow Gate - people were coming and going, coming and going all the time, and so you couldn't sort of give your heart to people who you didn't know if they were going to go back again. But when I did go back, and I said 'Right, I'm here now,' I was welcome very much in, and it was not difficult to make friends at all. Especially if I had my hairdressing scissors with me, and I cut people's hair!**

(Laughs). A good way to get in!

**'Anybody want their hair cut?' I didn't know that was going to happen, and I don't even know why I took my scissors with me - of all the things - I took a rucksack and that was my entire worldly goods, and I took my hairdressing scissors.**

It's almost like trading cigarettes!

**Yes! (Laughs).**

...haircuts at Greenham.

**Yeah, I cut really short hair, and everyone liked the way it felt, but of-course it meant the police couldn't get hold of your hair...**

Oh yes!

**...when it was really short, so there was several different reasons, but the sensory - touchy thing of it was really nice. And then seem of the women criticised me for making everybody look like they were from Belsen. But you know, because there was a lot of disagreements as well as agreements.**

And what made you decide to stay?

**Oh, there was no, I just - it was a feeling, it wasn't a thinking, really. As soon as I was there somebody showed me how to sign-on in Newbury - was it Newbury? Yes, must have been Newbury, and um, that was kind of it. I'd gone back because I just couldn't**

not be there, it felt like it was the hub of the universe, and in-fact I remember this one woman Jill - she moved, she'd been living in New York - right in Manhattan, and she said 'Well I was bored with New York, so where else could I come? It had to be here.' And it felt like that - it really felt it was the most important place in the world for that little time, to those of us who were there. It was so vibrant.

And there's a lot said about the art that was created. You've talked about hairdressing, um, and did you see a lot of that when you were there?

The weaving of the webs and all that was happening a lot. People were doing that sort of thing all the time - you couldn't, I think there was the feeling of doing this action, sort of ferment, almost volcanic - the energy rising of everybody being there and doing the same thing together, and that is a creative feeling. But you couldn't paint because everything got wet, and if you were worrying, which we were about being evicted a lot of the time, then everything was getting lost all the time - you couldn't write because of that. I ended up coming away without any contacts for people, except those that I was with when I left, because you didn't have paper, because it got lost or wet and just fell to pieces. So to make anything - any externalising of that feeling, a statement of it, had to be some sort of sculptural thing and that's why I think the kinds of art that was made was the sort of stuff that it was. And there was also - I mean we knew that what we were doing was transitory, that we were making things with leaves and twigs, which is - they would disappear, and because we were getting more and more aware about the ecological stuff as well as peace at the same time, we were also not wanting to make things that were going to damage the earth. Because there was the base with this death making thing to kill the world, and so we didn't want to be involved in that, we wanted to make things that would not damage it - would be gone easily and not, you know, that thing about leave only footprints.

That's so interesting, I've never heard that interpretation before of the arts being so important. And I also have wondered after speaking to a couple of other women, they've not kept in touch with any of the women that they were there with - which makes so much sense, how would you be able to? If you don't have anything to write it down with, or it gets wet and lost.

Yeah. I've found women almost accidentally in the time since, and I left with a group of women who, I'm not in touch with any of them anymore, we squatted in London and things just fell apart a bit - we were not united by that common bond anymore I suppose, and we all started to want to do other things, and I certainly wanted to be able to do something with what had happened to me, because it was transforming and because we were squatting and moving around, that took a lot of energy, and so another part of the reason why it all fell apart. And then when I moved up here I met

somebody who I'd known there, but by and large - there was a woman who was in Ireland who I met again - almost accidentally meeting people. And Facebook hasn't really helped, because people rarely say on Facebook that they were involved in Greenham. Strange, and I think what happened after - culturally, in the wider culture made us not particularly want to even talk about it, I think. I felt a bit silenced.

Oh, that's really sad. But really interesting that that was how you felt, and do you feel that the media at the time, and like you say - afterwards, that that made you retreat and not want to talk about it?

I think also we were a bit misunderstood, and the media did that of making you into these, and I've said being a heroine and a goddess earlier - but making us into something that we weren't, really. And people would come and - while we were living there - women, especially women with kids would shake my hand and say 'Thank you for doing this for us.', which was lovely, but I said to them 'I'm not doing it for you, I'm doing it - I'm just doing it.' And it wasn't for anybody else, so there was that - you know women can only be two kinds of person, and you've got to be sort of bleeding and damaged and always of-course doing it for somebody else, and I did not want to be connected to that stereotype of you know, I'm happy enough to be a nurturer, but I was not going to be the sacrificer of myself. And anyway, it was too much fun to be sacrificial! (Laughs).

That's really interesting, and did you find that a lot of women would come up to you say thank you for doing that?

Yeah. And men.

Oh really?

Yeah, because men used to come and visit.

That's really interesting.

Yeah, yeah it was common, and then of-course when we moved away I was in the squatter community, and a lot of the women had been there, and a lot of the men had been at mixed peace camps, so there was no particular need to talk about it, but then as my life moved on it did become something that was not exactly shameful, but it was a bit like my dirty past. And I do think the media at the time - that would have been the mid '80s - everything started to get very glamorised, so maybe it's to do with just that.

What I found really weird about the whole thing is - I find this with the miners' strike, it's not over, the ramifications and everything, but the actual event...(inaudible)...but there are politicians wrapped up...who act like it's still happening, and they have this viciousness about what happened, it's like it's 35 years ago, let it go. And I do feel that's weird - when I've told people about this project, a lot of them are really supportive, but some of them are like 'Oh, Greenham, duh duh duh duh', and I'm like 'Let it go - it is so long ago, why do you still hold on to this?' But it must be something about people's identities and what they see themselves in opposition to, and the 'other' and all that sort of stuff, but yeah, I was shocked that the prejudices that people hold on to that I find baffling. For me it's a historical event - which requires analysing, listen to people that were there, learn from it.

**Yeah. And I do think - I think because it was a women's action, I do think that was a lot stronger. You know, if you watch a quiz on the telly, nobody ever know the answers about women. Even women don't know the answers about women. Women's stuff just gets forgotten, so it's so much more - I think once it was over we were actively being squashed. Not consciously, I don't think - but there was some squashing because it was such an outburst of powerful female energy, and even though - the missiles did get taken away, but who knows whether it was the action that was the reason for that or not, but I think it was a big igniter in women's consciousness around the country, and I think that therefore had to be stopped.**

I agree. I also think that's probably one of the reasons that it hasn't been historicised in the way that the miners' strike has.

**Exactly.**

You know we all know that one, and also this one - the miner's strike, sorry I keep going on about it...

**But they were at the same time, and we noticed a difference in the way that the police responded. Because of the miners' strike they became a lot more violent. So it was exactly the same time.**

Yeah, and also led by men - but also it was part of a national story - of industry, whereas the Greenham thing is anomalous in the way it's part of, still a contentious movement - the peace movement, yeah and I think maybe that's one of the reasons, and that it was led by women and made up entirely of women.

**Yeah.**

And didn't kowtow to politicians, the miner's strike and whatever, but had quite close links with politicians, but Greenham didn't.

**...but I do remember people coming and visiting, and they would say 'Who's the leader?' And we'd all say 'Me!' Or we'd all say 'Her!' On purpose, but you know, and it was fine, but there was also meaning in that - it was completely anarchistic, we did have meetings and discuss things that were important, but there was nobody telling anybody what to do.**

I was going to ask you about if it was important to you at the time that it was a women only movement or not?

**I don't think I would have been interested in going if it hadn't of been. I mean I was coming out as a lesbian, so there was definitely that about it, but, and interestingly it wasn't a hotbed of sex, and it wasn't a hotbed of celibacy either, you know there was people got together and had their hot sex, which you do when you're in the beginning of a relationship - you know, and then you could hear it! (Laughs). Because we weren't living in walled buildings, but it was - that wasn't why people came. And somebody - I remember a woman who had been in prison coming along and saying she had come because it was a peace camp and she needed a bit of peace, and she had totally not comprehended that...but you know, why shouldn't it also be, because peace is that too. So fair enough. I think it was so much more interesting, because men were doing everything, and that was really boring.**

And did you find that in Manchester - when you were talking about the peace movement that you were sort of involved in, and the bookshop, did you find those gender constructions that you didn't find at Greenham? I've spoken to some people who were part of the CND movement, and they said the men were just...

**Yeah, I was never anything to do with CND so I didn't experience that but I do know that's the case. And I remember speaking to people from Greenpeace, who said 'You know, it's only ever the men who get to do any of the radical actions', and we did while I was living at Greenham, we did go and visit Faslane, and spoke to a woman who was there, and the way she was talking it was clear it was the men who did everything. And she was a bit, she was really curious about how we were able to anarchisticly decided things, and have the people who wanted to do it, do it, and the people who didn't want to do it didn't have to do it. And the ones who didn't do it didn't have to be the bottle washers either, so you know, but yeah it was just so much more interesting because it was different, but it was also about me, automatically. And yeah I hadn't been involved in the peace movement previously - it hadn't been attractive, although the idea of a peaceful planet, of-course that's attractive, but the movement was not.**



I found that, definitely with political movements, and especially local...(inaudible) very, there are men who've been there for 40 years and it's their turf, and I just can't do it. Whereas yeah, women's only creative spaces and things like that you feel automatically...and you're right, a lot of the women I've spoken to have said similar things about the decision making process - your choice was reflected. Yeah, I want to chat to you about that as well, in terms of when you were there how it worked with the decision making - we've talked about the meetings that happened, and the talking stick (laughs).

**We didn't have a talking stick at the meetings I went to, they hadn't been invited yet I don't think. I think there was a talking stick just before I left, and I didn't really understand it, um, and we used to have rows sometimes at the meetings, and sometimes - because those little personal stereos had just come in, and we had little cassette players, but because you were wearing a hat, you could actually have your headphones in secretly, and nobody would know - and some people, did attend the meetings and sit there nodding, but they were nodding to music, not to the decisions being made. So there was even anarchism going on in that. But, the decision making, some people would have an idea, and it would depend on the bigness of the idea - you might just tell a few people and go and do the thing that you did, so a few of us just went and slept in the base overnight, because that's what we were going to do. We didn't need anybody's permission, we just did it. And we left stuff in the base so that they knew that people had been there - we left things that made it obvious that we had been there all night long.**

What did you leave?

**Can't remember. We didn't leave a sleeping bag, maybe we did leave a blanket or something, and evidence of a fire! Probably did leave a blanket, because that would have been a wool blanket, and it would have just decayed away if it wasn't taken. But, um, and I do remember it was very important to leave something. And other things that there were bigger actions that were happening, and when I went down there had been the over Christmas the New Year's action, that had already happened, and there was going to be the beginning of the court case, and I think that's why Manchester was starting to get more involved, because of wanting to be able to support the court case as it went along. But there were other actions that as a result of that we knew that women may be going to go to prison, and then women were sent to prison because of it. And so bigger actions, where we thought there was a possibility we might be going to be sent to prison, we did - that was the sort of thing that got talked about more at a meeting, and some women would say 'Well I can't go to prison because I've got kids', and some would say 'I really don't want to do this', and other women would say 'That's totally fine by me'. And I did actions that never**

led to me going to prison, but I think I had a civil action against me for one of the things, but I can't even remember what it was now. But again it was just, you kind of said yeah, I'm in, and then you would be in, and you may have - you know it wouldn't be meetings as such, but you would have to work out how you were going to do a thing, but that's what they were, it they were just little informal 'Come on, let's go and talk about this'. And you would go and talk about something and work out how you were going to do it.

And the actions that you mentioned, how, is there a rough number - do you remember how many you went on?

I have no idea! I just don't even know, I can't remember - little ones, big ones, they were happening all the time. I remember we had a naked blockade of the base because we thought the police wouldn't want to touch us, which was true. We kept our boots on in-case they dragged us, we wouldn't get our feet grazed, but they would drag you so you banged your knees still, that was annoying. And we had a snagging blockade, because we thought that love would be something nobody could object to - but of-course they did. So, and you can probably tell that I was much more likely to be involved in things that had a lightness and a sense of humour about them, and that was the sort of thing I was attracted to, so that was the sort of thing I ended up doing more often.

And did you enjoy doing that?

Yeah. It was scary but it was exciting. Adrenaline is a good drug. And then after actions we would all feel like shit the day after, because it's a drug and you come down and you feel dreadful - sometimes for three days if it's a really big action.

And were you - you said you were arrested once?

Yeah. A few times. I remember being held in the cells in Newbury, overnight sometimes and they'd dump us out in the middle of the night, and at the other side of the base so you had to walk all the way back, but I was never dumped on my own on the other side of the base. I know some women were, and I think that depended who the duty officers were and just how misogynistic they were, I guess.

From the women I've interviewed, the actions of the police just seemed quite petty?

Oh yeah.

And it was, I don't know - yeah, well what was your experience, was it kind of a pettiness?

Yeah. I remember, we had these links with um, Holloway Prison - we were doing quite a lot of stuff around women in prison and the fact that the majority of women in prison are there because they've been abuse, or they've nicked to feed themselves and most often with about their children. So we had links, we started - I don't know who did it, but whoever did it, we started to have connections with the Women in Prison group, and we had set up a little camp outside of Holloway Prison, which was only an ordinary width of pavement. And I remember this one policeman was being really petty about us being there, and we'd moved out stuff so that people could walk by, but he was doing us for obstruction. And Jill, who was the one from New York that I'd mentioned earlier, she called him 'A wanker', so he wrote it down in his little book, and I remember her going to court for having called him a wanker, because that was - I can't remember what, there was some sermon-ology that he used which made it into a case - offensive - I don't know if there's an offensive language, I mean there were no hate crimes at that time...

Oh public...

**Public indecency?**

Might be that.

So anyway, we were there in court, and Jill, she was 40, so she was a proper grown up! (Laughs). Says Mica from considerably older position - but she'd been involved in a whole load of art stuff - political art in New York, and she's dead now a lot of people are dead now, but I remember she addressed - I think it was a judge, not even a magistrate, and she said 'Your Honour, who, I did call him a wanker'. He said that she had shouted it. She said 'I used the same tone of voice that I'm using to you. I do have a voice that carries, but I don't ever have to raise it.' And you could really see that the judge was thinking 'Aye,aye', and she said 'And to call somebody a wanker is merely saying that they masturbate. Who among us has not masturbated?' (Laughs). And the judge goes bong, case dismissed! That's the sort of thing that happened.

Yeah. Just, well a sense of humour - like you said. Um, you've kind of answered this about non-violent direct action, duh duh duh, and um, ...

**I didn't understand what non-violent direct action was at all.**

When I went to the training day for this, I was like like what? And people were like 'Protests?' Oh yes, cool. Just call it that!

**But I didn't understand what it even meant, and why you couldn't slap somebody's hand off you, and why you had to simply allow yourself to be dragged away. The passivity of it, and I guess one of the things that we started doing with the naked blockade and the snogging blockade was we remained passive in that we didn't stop anybody from dragging us away, because by that point I did understand it. But we also thought we're not going to be passive about this, because they are women, and we can't be because we're expected to be, so we mustn't be completely passive, and I think that also elevated things to a different level of creativity, because you have to think outside the box.**

And also a different level of consciousness, to say like actually there is a power in not being passive, but in 'I won't interact with your violence'. I find that really powerful, and really powerful about Greenham that it created in a sense, that you're not even meeting male violence on its own terms, you're doing something completely different.

**Yeah. Yeah, and I think that that was a, a very powerful consciousness raising for all of us. There were some women who had already done consciousness raising things, but most of us had not. And there were some women who had done stuff within the peace movement, and there were women who'd done women's groups, with the women's movements, and so those things came together. And then there were all the others of us who had never done anything like it before, but then that raised consciousness that happened - we were putting everything together, and that's what really feminism is about - the connectedness, now that's what makes it so radical - it's not like the Labour Party and where they, and especially at the moment it seems extremely blinkered and single track, with what was happening with our minds, we were seeing the connectedness of things, and how everything was, well we didn't blame it all on the patriarchy, and I don't know that it is necessarily all the patriarchy to blame, but that particular power structure that is all about climbing to the top and trampling all over everybody else underneath you. I do think that that is probably a lot of the reason of why we're in this mess, you know, ecologically speaking - because the planet comes last, doesn't it?**

And people who are working - and women and children come last in those conversations.

**Yeah, always at the bottom of the pyramid.**

Would you, what was your thought process at the time - from going from not understanding non-violent direct action, not understanding what it was, moving to understanding it. What was - were there pressure points when you started to understand more?

Not that I remember but perhaps there were, um, but it was - I think it was more like as if my life had been a jigsaw, and as time was going on in being there and being exposed to people with such different lives and who'd got such different experiences, and soaking it all up, it was as if the picture on the jigsaw was becoming visible, and that it allowed me to see - what life is, what this world is, how everybody works, and I read something just today on Facebook, and it was a guy that was talking saying 'The government' - it was an article about gaslighting and narcissism in relationships, and he was saying it happens not only in relationships, the government is doing it now and that sort of connecting is exactly the sort of connecting that we were doing back then, and I'm certain that that is why the movement had to be quashed, because that level of awake-ness about how we are all being drugged through the telly and through the drugs into not thinking and not taking an action and not having any action, and gaslighting even has a name now which it didn't then, you know it is being done - we're being told that what we know to be true is not, and yeah...it's interesting that gaslighting is something that I was imagined would only, could only happen to women.

Yes, yes.

And I guess that one for the things that is both good and bad is that people are recognising no, it happens, and people use it to enforce power, and anybody who has power will use it on anybody that has less power, and it is the perfect tool if you're a politician, and of-course it's gone on forever - that's what 1984 is all about.

Yeah. But I think in a weird, not even in a good way - maybe in a long term good way, is that gaslighting is now not being, it maybe won't just be used for male female relationships, it will be used for power structures. Which essentially is what that is talking about, a male female relationship is a power structure. Yeah, and hopefully it now...

**Well I guess if its happening to men it's going to get spoken about a bit more, isn't it? (Laughs). Grrrr, but...**

Not a good thing, but I'm happy it's being talked about.

**Well yeah, that it's recognised as a thing.**

Yeah, and it's frustrating that until it's happening to men (inaudible). And with relationships with men we've already talked about it, the relationship with the police, but also the relationship with the bailiffs, or the idea of bailiffs at Greenham or the military as well, if you had any thoughts on those?

Didn't really have any connection with the guys in the base at all. They would go in in their busses, and it was like they were scared to even look at us. So we did kind of play with that a little bit with witch badges and doing witch stuff. I remember there being a big thunder storm one night, and the lightening went around the base, around and around and around the base, and it was um, it was forked lightening, none of it was earthed. It looked like dragons in the sky. We were all out there, yelling and whooping and getting soaking wet, and properly behaving like crazy women. I am not surprised those poor squaddies in the base were terrified. I think we were pretty scary when we'd got something on us, like that, and I also remember, I had the little badge that said witch on it, and I don't remember what his name was - the Tory politician from Newbury came up to speak to us, and I spoke to him, I can't remember what it was I said, but I do remember it appearing in the paper the following week that when he went he was spoken to by one of the witches, and he's never been ill before, but he lost his voice as a result! And I do remember thinking 'You're an idiot, just shut up' so maybe I did make him lose his voice!

What a claim! (Laughs).

That was really funny. And then people came up looking for the witch that had cursed him and made him lose his voice and then again, everyone's going 'It's her!'

(Laughs). That's incredible! But also that he believed it - that's amazing!

I know, because you don't expect them to believe in 'woo-woo' people like that, do you? (Laughs)

And I was also going to ask - relationship with local residents, and if you had any interaction with them?

Well there were a few local women who let us go to their houses for baths, and were really, really supportive. But mostly, I didn't have anything really bad happen - people used to call us 'kippers', people used to sniff because we smelled like woodsmoke, as we were walking down the street - and people would shout names after us like 'Lesbian' and we'd say 'Yeah, and? But, we didn't go to Newbury on our own - we would always go in a group, partly because it was a damn sight more convenient - somebody would have a car and you'd go together in the car, because it was a long way to walk back. But it would have been scary to go on your own because there was distinct hostility, and lots of the pubs wouldn't let us in, lots of the cafes wouldn't let us in, you know, and when we were queuing to sign-on, there were definitely people would say 'Woooo, what are you doing?' And it was like 'Well you're in the queue behind me, I'm saving the world, what are you doing?' Because we were not abashed

**by people saying things like that, because we were fired up with the radicalism and what it was that we were doing, but again we weren't on our own.**

Do you think it it was - like you said, the community that you were in, kind of bolstered?

**Gave us power and confidence, and safety in numbers, definitely.**

And the people that were kind in Newbury, how did you meet them? Or did they come to Greenham?

**I think mostly they'd come and visit, and they'd come and say 'I live locally', and then somehow or other we found out where they lived - they'd have given their address, and somebody would be taking a car and a few of us would go and have a bath.**

Um, and ..

**Oh yeah, I was ill actually, and I went and stayed at somebody's house. Yeah, yeah, because I was too poorly.**

Yeah, I wondered about the general domestic admin of the camp. I was asking somebody about tampons, and I was like 'Well where did you get them from?', she was like 'The shop!'

**We had our dole trips, so we did have money, and people would bring a lot of food, so we actually had a reasonably good amount of disposable income, because we weren't paying rent, we didn't get any rent only, so that wasn't an issue, but we got a lot of food donated, and people would arrive with, coming for a sort period of time, and they would often bring food and drugs and alcohol, so there was - we were not going short as far as those kinds of things were concerned. And we just went into Newbury and bought the things that we wanted so we might buy particular food that we might want, or if we were going o make a meal we might, because sometimes you would make - usually there would be a big meal being made - everyday, but people would also go off and make a little fire, and if they wanted something else, or a bit of space, a bit of privacy, so then you'd buy your own food, probably. Or there was a place where loads of food was kept, and you would take some.**

When did you leave? Was it 1983?

**It was still the same year, and it would have been August.**

And did you not go back after that?

No.

Why?

I'm not sure, you know. We were up and down to London a bit before, to the Holloway thing, and some of the women who were living in London, they would visit as well, so we'd go and stay with people for a few days. But when, well when I left and we were squatting and we were living in London I became very involved with that, but I didn't have transport, and so to actually get back was quite difficult. When I used to be living there I would get the coach from London to Greenham or from Greenham to London, if I was going on a trip - or we would go in a car. But yeah, it was just awkward because from Newbury it was a long walk to get to the camp itself, but it did also feel a bit like - by the time I was leaving, the biggest, there was starting to be more women moving out, so Greenham for me wasn't necessarily there at the camp, it was to do with that group of women that I was with, and there was a whole big women's squatting community in Hackney, where it was that I was living, so Greenham was there.

So this question may not be relevant. How much do you think the camp was infiltrated or sabotaged towards the end?

I've got no clue. I really didn't experience that, and maybe I'd already gone by the time anything of that type, but no idea. It's not something that I experienced at all.

And do you feel that there is a legacy of Greenham within the feminist world?

I think feminists are a bit ashamed of Greenham.

Do you think?

Yeah. I think now it's probably getting a little bit more kudos again, but I think during the '90s it was a bit of a dirty secret, a bit of a guilty thing, and I certainly didn't really talk about it among the feminists I was around, but then feminism took a real nose dive anyway, so maybe the whole thing was all part of one thing that was happening about the lash back against it, so I'm not certain, I'm not certain. Definitely when I look at the other things I've done in my life since, I can see how connected to my life at Greenham they were, they are, definitely everything I've done since has been informed by it, absolutely. But I don't know that anybody has - I do remember bumping into somebody and she talking about how everybody had gone straight with their Greenham stuff that they'd learnt - we were becoming counsellors and therapists and stuff like that, and that's not really going straight is it?



Not at all.

**That's still. very much work to help people transform their love. I mean I was a therapist for some time and I was working with people who had been sexually abused and ritually abused, it was roper heavy end stuff. I think a lot of us were doing that kind of work. And a lot of other kind of ways of just not going along with the mainstream - continuing to challenge the status quo, if not necessarily visibly. But certainly in Todmorden where I live now, there's a lot of women who were at Greenham then and farming, and living on the land, and carrying on the legacy in that way - being close to the land, there's all sorts of different ways that we have interpreted what we experienced there.**

Yeah, I think there's something to say about therapists and counsellors, and it's what you've said before about I'm not doing this for you, I'm doing it for me, and I wonder if those two things are connected as well? It's not a caring profession, but it's a much more empathetic profession than most others. I don't know. Because the other women I've spoken to have done - they're counsellors or they're therapists, and I can't help feeling that is connected in someway.

**I definitely think that the transformation that I experienced through living at Greenham meant that I was aware that people's lives can be transformed, and I think I wanted more of that. And while I was theraping, some of the work that I was doing was really really raw, but it still didn't feel sacrificial of myself to do it, and when it did start to - because I wasn't getting external support - then I stopped doing it. Um, but there was that - actually people would say to me 'How can you do this work, how can you bear it hearing such horrible stories from people?' And I would say 'Because it's amazing to see - to know how people have found themselves, and the the resilience of people, that's just an absolutely inspiring thing to be I involved in.' But the line between those makes it very clear - in that to see somebody getting hold of their life, and not necessarily going from being abject to being completely powerful, but certainly being part of that journey, it's really inspiring.**

Yeah, and I find it interesting that from hat you've said people will talk, people would expect you to internalise what they were saying to you, but why would you? You're a professional. Obviously I'm not saying it wouldn't have been very hard and taxing in a professional sense, but why is it expected that you as a woman would therefore...

**That's exactly what women do though, absorb everyone else's shit and deal - it's everybody else's shit, and often as well by internalising it and then having passive aggressive behaviour - everybody, well not everybody, but lots of us have been around a mother who like simmered as she made the Christmas dinner! You know.**

Did you enjoy being a therapist?

Yeah, I was a therapist for nearly 20 years in the voluntary sector, in Manchester, and I really enjoyed it. and when I stopped doing it I really felt like I'd lost my identity, but I had to because the support systems, the charity I was working in closed down, before that for a while the support systems within it crumbled, and I was doing such heavy work that I couldn't carry on, so yeah, I really missed it when I stopped. But now I run the only company of women plumbers in the world!

Yes, I saw. How did you come to do that?

Accident! Again! No clear plan ever. No, my partner started Stop Cocks - in 1990 she trained as a plumber - she left being a teacher and she trained to be a plumber and, because she'd always wanted to be, and always had been very practical, and she carried on - many women at around about the same time me - late '80s, were training in manual trades, but a lot of them, and I knew quite a few of them when I lived in London, but many of them just didn't carry on doing it, and when there had been the GLC in London, the GLC employed a lot of women, but as guestings changed as well - when the GLC collapsed, but Hattie always worked for herself, because when she started working as a plumber nobody would give her a job, so she thought 'Right then', because she had bills to pay, so she set up working for herself, and her company was immediately called Stop Cocks - it's not a name that's been made up for Twitter, it's a name that has come out of her very much Carry On influenced sense of humour! But um, so she was a Stop Cocks woman plumber for a long time. But when she got a computer, and she set up - had a little website, women started contacting saying 'How do I become a plumber?' And she looked at all the different ways she might be able to do it, and they were all over the country, so she thought I can't employ them, because they're over the place, and most of them didn't know how to be a plumber, and they wanted apprenticeships, and she thought 'If I have one apprentice, then all my energy is going to go into that one woman, and that would mean that she could therefore not support all of the other women that wanted to become plumbers, so she looked at different ways to do it, and she joined an entrepreneurs' network at the same time, and they were saying to let people know about what you're doing - gather your tribe around you, and go where the tribe are, but they're so scattered, there is no tribe of tradeswomen. So she started writing newsletters and one by one contacting women, but again that took tons of energy, and I was with her by this point that she was starting to do this, and I was a little bit helping, but not so much because I was still theraping, but I guess my feminist perspective on things had an influence all along really. So from trying to contact women individually, she thought that's just taking too much time and too much energy and I still have my own living to make, so she thought 'No, I'll just make myself

more visible, and that started happening at the same time as websites became easier and cheaper to produce, and then what has really made the difference has been social media, which is one of the things I particularly do within the business - I mostly do marketing. I mean I do answer the phone to people when they ring as well, and hand out advice to people all over the place - who are wanting to become plumbers, and do interviews and do articles, but it's mostly marketing. And social media has really made it possible for women in the industry to become very, very much more visible. But I'm constantly being drawn to the campaigning Mica from my Greenham time, and it's important to have that, but we're a business and we've never had any funding from anybody for the business, so the business always has to be able to stand on its own two feet, but that gives it massive independence. Recently we've started - we're just now doing our third conference, and we do get sponsorships from within the industry to be able to do that, and I lead organising that, so we do get little tiny bits of funding as sponsorships, but that's specifically for the use - to be able to promote the conference, and it is the only opportunity for women plumbers to get together. At the first conference there were women there who had never seen another woman plumber, even though they'd been working in the industry some time. Only one in a hundred plumbers are women, and there are a hundred thousand gas engineers in this country - there are five hundred women gas engineers, and it's similar number with electricians to the gas engineers, and in-fact an electrician came along to the last one and she crewed, because she wanted to be able to do something, but on her own - you can't do it on your own - I was able to devote two weeks to it because Hattie was doing the plumbing, and it was just part of running the business.

What an incredible thing.

I mean I'm - Hattie is the one who makes, and she is the galvanizing force, but that's not the stuff that I do - I am brilliant number two, and not number two - second, you know, I think forget leaders, they're not important, having somebody who will get the shit done is at-least as important, and that's what it is that I do - I make it all happen.

Sounds fantastic.

It's good. Finally we're getting some recognition, and having been plodding away, and not recognised, and not paid for all the things that we've been doing all this time - the whole business has been supported just by Hattie plumbing for a long time, and now there are enough women around the country who are Stop Cock plumbers that we've got the business is more than standing on its own feet financially, and is starting to pay us a little bit, but Hattie still does plumbing, and you know we're hoping to get her paid speaking gigs and stuff like that, to be able to properly pay us,

so that she doesn't have to plumb anymore. Because she's 55, she had planned to stop at 40, because your knees go when you're a plumber.

Oh I bet. Yeah. A world I didn't know existed (Laughs)!

Well we got a message on Facebook the other day from a woman whose 9 year old wanted to be a plumber - Molly, and um, all the other girls at school were laughing at her, and she said 'She's really gone down in the dumps, and can you send her any encouragement?' So first I was just doing it with our own plumbers, but I thought this has to go wider, so I took her name out and I put something on Twitter, this is why we need to a company of women plumbers, and there's some guys as well - everybody's sending in messages of support for her as well. But somebody said 'We should do a tour of schools' and there is this thing where people go along and say 'Draw me a firefighter, and draw me...' and then they bring out women don't they? But somebody said 'We should have a national tour of construction women's tour' and I thought okay, well come to the conference, we can set up a group and you can organise that. Because I'm not going to organise that - I'm doing enough action, but I will facilitate it happening for somebody else to make that happen.

I think that's a fantastic idea.

**Yeah, and we probably could get some funding for it as well.**

How, a lot of people, and this is (inaudible), talked about a baby being born at Greenham, I was wondering if you saw any children at the camp?

**Well I saw the baby being born!**

Did you? Jay?

**Yeah, he must be a proper man now.**

Late 30s, I think.

There were a lot of children - quite a lot of the own that I knew had children. Some of the women had their children with them some of the time, some of the women were there sometimes because they always had their children with them, and yeah I was there when Jay was born. In-fact my friend whose name is Jay, who um I did put her in touch with Becca - when Sarah was giving birth to Jay she got tired, and the midwives helping her got tired and Jay was holding her, because she's a big woman - at the moment he was born, and her name is now Jay, which it was not at the time - she was called Hex at the time.

What?

**So yeah, and she lives near here, you might get to speak to her - a local person.**

So was the midwife onsite already? Or was she a Greenham woman?

**No, I think they were in contact with the Radical Midwives, and they came out specifically, because Sarah had contacted them quite deliberately, and she was very clear that she wanted to give birth at the camp. Even though I think she had to go into hospital just after - I think she was quite poorly, and I think Jay was too.**

Yeah, I just always found that story just completely incredible.

**I was totally gobsmacked myself. She was involved in loads of actions throughout her entire pregnancy.**

What a thing.

**I didn't appreciate how cool she was at the time - to have done that, but looking back..**

(Inaudible)

**Oh maybe, I don't know that.**

(Inaudible)... somebody else. No, maybe I'm getting confused. I always thought what am amazing - what a legacy - what an identity to have, as being born there. And we've kind of touched on this, but can you explain why you think it's important for future generations to learn about Greenham?

**I think it's really important that women's history is no longer lost, but I also think, I get very frustrated that because of the way that women's history is lost, each generation has to learn things afresh, and each generation is inventing the wheel, so no wonder we're not getting as far as we should, and so by it being brought back out into awareness, we can start - people can learn from our mistakes and take it to the next stage, and the next stage and the next stage rather than everyone just repeating the same mistakes over and over. And if we're going to evolve, which I sometimes wonder when I look at what's happening in the world if we are going to give ourselves any opportunity to evolve at all, but if we are, we absolutely have to start learning this, it's stupidity, it's madness to do the same things again and again. But if people don't know then we will.**

Yeah.

**An example of what a mad state we're in with the world.**

I agree, I think it's - I was having this conversation in another interviewer, and the lady brought up the conversation around gender, and kind of representations, and she was like 'We had these conversations at Greenham, we did it all, like why are people forgetting?'

**We did. And I remember, and I think the current debate around gender, it is extremely divisive, and it's not only - it's divisive between transsexuals and transvestites - to use the old terminology, because people who have gone through the process and actually changed their physical bodies are being left out of this entire debate. But I do remember somebody turning up and saying 'I'm a woman' with polka dot peep-toe high heeled shoes on, and a matching polka dot dress, and we said - 'And so how are you going to cope in the mud?' And I also remember a gay guy - friend of mine staying 'You see, it's the bloody lesbians who are doing this, not us - we couldn't even go and do it, because we wouldn't have anywhere to plug our hairdryer in.' And it - the gay men were not capable of doing it, because their culture was taking them to be in a different way - it was not possible for other groups to do it - it was a certain bunch of radicalised women who were rejecting what we were told women had to be like. It wasn't only lesbians by a long chalk, by a very long chalk, actually, but it was women who were radicalised to a very particular degree, or who went and who became very quickly radicalised because they saw something that they needed and wanted, and recognised, and had been looking for on some level. And I'm sure that that's what happened to me - that there was a gap, that I got there, and it was like '(makes sucking sound), Oh yeah, I'm getting that now'.**

That's beautiful.