

**Nina Milns**

Just tell me a bit about your background, past and current.

**So I was born in West London and I grew up in London. I'm from a mixed background. And I am working as a writer, and an actor and an activist.**

Okay, and how do you know about Greenham?

**So I found out about the Greenham project because I was connected to a few, er, similar people to Kate, and Rebecca, and on Twitter, and I saw that there was a call out for anybody who was involved in Greenham, to come forward and to share their stories. And it made me remember that the nursery that I'd been to had been set up by er, some women that were involved at Greenham.**

Right, when was that?

**So the nursery was in the '80s. I think I certainly was there possibly from '81 until '84. But it could be '82. Um, and it was already established, then I don't know how long for maybe just one or two years. Yeah.**

And how, roughly how old were you?

**So I think when I started there could have been as young as one or two.**

Oh gosh!

**Yeah, yeah.**

When do you think first memories kick in?

**Well, this is it. I mean, I remember it very clearly. I remember it very clearly. Which is why I think I mean, my mum ended up having a job there, which meant that my connection to the nursery extended beyond my nursery years. So I guess I, er, am not exactly clear whether the memories that I have are definitely, well, no, I know that some of them were definitely from the time that I was there. And after that, when I when I went to visit or you know, hung out with my mum, I mean, because of the ethos of the place, it was quite relaxed in terms of the ages of the people that were there. And certainly because I**

was the daughter of someone who was working there, I was more involved than maybe others would be.

And what was the ethos of the nursery?

Well, obviously at the time, I didn't know that it was any different from anywhere else. But what I remember is a group of very strong, warm women, all women, and from a variety of backgrounds. Most of them were white. But we did have some Canadians. We had some South Africans, and we had a few workers who were black or Asian or mixed. And my understanding is that the way the um, hierarchy was structured was there wasn't one, that they were all equal, and they made decisions collectively. They had meetings every week to collectively make the decisions about the way the nursery was being run. They were, you know, each person, I think, was allocated different responsibilities. So for example, if someone had experience with accounting or something like that, or, or even general management, then they would take the lead, but the decisions were made collectively so that was the first thing. The second thing I remember is that they wanted us to address them as workers. So if we had a problem, or if we needed help, we'd raise our hands and call for a worker, so we wouldn't say Miss Brown, or teacher or whatever we'd say 'Worker, worker', and someone would come.

And just the general 'Work, worker? Not 'Worker number one'?

No, no, no none of that. No, no, just an acknowledgement that that's what they were there to do, and that they will all equal, you know with that title, I think.

So that was, what would you say the key part of the ethos of the nursery was? You talked about equality...

Yes, I do think equality was part of it. I do also feel and I know that this word is a complex word, but intersectionality seemed to be quite a big one as well. And I mean that in terms of, the books that we had, you know, the children's picture books, for example, with very simple stories in them were quite advanced in there - I mean, they chose the books very carefully, I think. Because, for example, my favourite book, I remember, the the lead character in that was a little black girl in a wheelchair. And she got to go on lots of adventures, and she was the hero of the stories. And that was just a normal thing for me. Obviously, I didn't know any different. I didn't know that in

general that's not what children's books look like. And so that was my first experience of you know, books, for example, and who was allowed to go on adventures, and who was allowed to be the protagonist in their own adventures, and what they were capable of, what they were allowed to do and who was allowed to be at the centre of the story.

And can you think of a specific story?

I feel like that book was called Sweet Franny Adams. And I remember her being um, in a kind of an urban setting, so a city of some kind, and I think she had a beret on (laughs). Yeah, I mean I might have made some of this up, but I don't remember what the story was. I remember it being really simple like maybe one sentence per page. But she got to go on an adventure. That's all I remember. And it might have been a very simple kind of um, domestic adventure with, with a brother and a sister, or a mum or a dad.

So there were male characters there?

Oh there were, yeah, but they weren't the centre of the story. Certainly in that book anyway. And the other thing that I remember was that there was quite, it felt like quite a kind of a progressive approach to gender identity. I mean, I wouldn't go so far as to say sexuality, you know, because we were so young, but certainly I know that many, many of the workers were openly gay, queer, bisexual, um we met their girlfriends, we, you know, their partners. It was, it was a very, it was a community so, so a lot of the - a lot of what was happening went beyond just the nursery hours, you know, I remember lots of parties and obviously because my mum was involved with them, you know, they were part of our, you know, social life as well. But I do remember, I remember boys walking around in dresses from the fancy dress box, you know, little black boys in dresses. I remember a lot of that and I and I remember kind of us being encouraged to, to just explore our identity without, well with as little, um conditioning in terms of gender normative messages as possible. And I do not remember the word 'girls and boys' ever being used. I might be wrong. But I do feel that very possibly, they would have made a decision not to even make distinctions of that sort. And I remember that there was one room with a line of toilets, little kind of toilets for kids. And that was it. It was it was for everybody to use. There were no, there weren't even any cubicles. You just walked in and used a toilet and came out again. So that's what I remember being the ethos kind of thing. And I also remember that the songs we sang And the nursery rhymes we sang that the words, the lyrics were tweaked or

changed in order to have more of a balance, so I'm, I feel like I remember and I, and again this is you know me kind of reaching back something like 'Baa Baa Black Sheep have you any wool? Yes sir, yes sir' or 'Yes, woman, yes woman, three bags full. One for one for the mistress, one for the dame, and one for the little girl who lives down the lane.'

Oh, you've remembered it.

So again, I guess it was about who was allowed to be the person in the top position of power, you know, etc. But of course we didn't know any different.

Talking about power - you all very young - it was a nursery school, but were the children ever allowed to be part of that collective decision making - did they ask you what you thought?

I think so. What I do remember is there was a structure to the day that allowed for a lot of free play. A lot of creativity, a lot of getting messy. We had a little garden where we could go out and get messy, and you know, lots of paint and artwork, and lots of cooking and shopping, for both the boys and the girls. But what I remember is that everyday ended with us in one room, sitting together, singing songs, talking about things, telling stories. And, and I don't specifically remember us being asked for our opinion, but what I do feel is that we were encouraged to feel like a community that was equal. Um, I certainly felt listened to, included, um encouraged in every way. I felt very, very free and when I looked around I just saw kids that were just free to absolutely be themselves, with as little of that kind of external conditioning as possible.

Would you say it was a very safe place for you to develop and grow?

I felt, yeah, I felt extremely safe, but it was more than that. It was, you know, I know that maybe now there's so much safeguarding in place for very good reasons. And the, the, the boundaries were there in terms of keeping us very, very safe. And, but there was an immense amount of freedom.

So safety that enables you to express yourself?

Exactly that, yeah. And that the women, they were just such strong personalities like, you know, I remember there was one woman called Mary Susan who was a clown from Canada. And er, she was just larger than life. She had this laugh - she'd sit on the stairs and just laugh for a good five

minutes, and it was so infectious, and oh just so many - I could go on and on and on. But each one was very, very different. And um, now I know kind of very, again very free or certainly living an alternative lifestyle to, I guess some of the norms, um and I know that there was perhaps also a connection with the values and the ethos of the GLC at the time, which I understand was being run by, er well initially Ken Livingstone and then is it John McDonnell, as well?

I don't think he ran the GLC. I don't think so, I'm not absolutely sure to be honest.

**Okay, but I know that it was labour representatives.**

Ken Livingstone was in there a long time.

**Yeah, maybe it was him then. Maybe it was him.**

And he was there during Margaret Thatcher's time - he used to hang a banner from the other side of the river.

**Right, right. And I know that they were supported quite strongly by the GLC to run the nursery in that way with those values, and were given a lot of support and freedom to do that - is my understanding.**

Was there anything you didn't like about it?

That's a good question. I guess at the time I didn't feel this, but I guess now, you know, it, it was an inner city nursery, so the space was limited. And they did so much to try and give us the freedom of being outside, getting mucky. Um I know that you know, if, if we ran out of, you know, resources or there needed to be a shop, they'd grab five of us and take us shopping, and then we'd come back and help with the cooking in a safe way. I wonder what it would have been like if we just had more space, you know. Um because I remember feeling immensely free and obviously, you know, as a kid, you just accept whatever space you're given, you know, and it's great. And you make the most of it. Um, but it was essentially on a um, a road that was full of houses, you know. And so it was converted from a house, I think.

Space is such a premium, it's difficult. Unless it's purpose built in a school or something.

It certainly wasn't purpose built. I mean, it was it was adapted for a nursery - I remember that very clearly. But um, I just wonder what else would have been possible if we just had even more space. Yeah...

What do you remember about, or did any of the women, the worker women, who were there, did they ever talk about Greenham and tell you stories?

I don't remember that. I don't remember Greenham ever being mentioned. I'm, I think that some of them definitely had been part of setting up the nursery - y understanding is maybe that initially the idea was to share child care while the women were to-ing and fro-ing from Greenham. So again, it was that sense of communal child care. Um, that I think was the initial ethos. And then I think it went beyond that to just wanting to offer that same level of nurturing, and care, and education to the local kids. Because certainly when I was that was a real mix of kids you know, working class, middle class, black, Asian, mixed race, white, so even though the workers I would still say were predominantly white and middle class - um not all of them, but most of them, the children weren't - the children were inner city kids.

And what did the locals think of the nursery? I mean you wouldn't have been aware at the time, but in retrospect?

Well, the interesting thing was that pocket of London seemed to have some quite radical characters around. So I know that one woman, Barbara...

Sorry, where were you - which part of London was it?

So this nursery was in Hammersmith, in West London. And there was a woman called Barbara who lived four doors down that was part of the nursery. I'm pretty sure she may have been part of setting it up. There was another woman called Michelle, who um, was a mechanic for a while, um who lived across the road. And then a lot of us had grown up kind of Notting Hill way, Westbourne Grove, Ladbroke Grove, and so I remember that being an area full of artists, full of musicians. I mean, my father's a musician. Our house was full of musicians and artists and these feminists, you know, so it was this incredible time in London at the time. And of course, I didn't know any different, but when I was born in a squat in Notting Hill, but the squat was full of, on the one hand artists, and on the other hand immigrants and it was a lovely experience, so you know, from what I remember. And then we got a

council house in West London, and so my memory of the area was one that was full of, um really interesting characters, a real sense of community. I remember going to the local park and always bumping into the same people. There was one incident where my grandma had come over from Cyprus to visit and she didn't speak any English. And, um one of these artists, guys, who was a six foot tall guy saw me in the park, and asked me where my mum and dad was. And I said, they're not here. And he didn't ask me who else I was with. So I stopped there, and he thought I was on my own. So he picked me up and put me on his shoulders and started bounding off with me. And my grandma started screaming and chasing down the road! But the point was that there was so many people I could turn to, because it was the same characters, you know, around - everyone knew each other. So I don't remember anything other than a real sense that it fitted in quite well. And because of the mix of kids there, I feel like the local - a lot of local people really wanted their children to have that experience. And I can imagine they made it, well, I was gonna say affordable, but I'm pretty sure it was all free, basically. And yeah, in fact it was - the whole thing was free.

Subsidised by the GLC?

Yes. Yeah. Yeah, I assume so. And, and it was a lovely local place. And we did you know, we did go out shopping, I remember trips to the local park. Um certainly that, I remember also going to the local theatre like The Riverside Studios that used to have a lot of shows for kids then. I'm not sure if it was trips with a nursery or not, or whether it was just in my family and what have you.

All blurred into the same thing?

Exactly. Yeah.

Talking about your family, what did your mum tell you about Greenham, and what was her involvement in Greenham?

So my mum, er I didn't speak with her about Greenham in-particular. And so my mum and her best friend got jobs at this nursery, and I actually spoke to her best friend more - Genevieve, about her memories of it. I think er, she may have visited Greenham once. Er, but if I'm honest, the the connection seemed to be more in London and what you could do for the kids in London, essentially. What I do remember is that we went on a lot of marches, here in

London. Some were, you know, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. I remember one in particular where I was, I think, four years old, and I was on my dad's shoulders, and it was er, for a march to free Nelson Mandela. And someone handed me a loudspeaker at the age of four, and I didn't know what to do with it. And my dad was whispering to me say 'What do we want?' So I shouted 'What do we want?' And, you know, hundreds of people went 'Mandela free!'. And he said, say 'When do we want it?' So I said that, and they went 'Now!' and the feeling of power!

Is this when you wanted to be on the stage then?

**That basically, yeah! (Laughs).**

A defining moment.

That was, there was no looking back after that! Um, but that certainly was a big part of my upbringing - was at protests, at rallies, for a variety of causes. Greenham, I have to say, I don't remember the words being mentioned, but I do remember the, the, the posters, the badges, the, um the women being kind of generally politically active. Um, and this sense of being part of, what I understand now, a feminist movement in the '80s. That certainly I think was dominated in this country by the Greenham cause, and extended out to my experience of being a child in London at the time.

Yeah. Um, your mother did actually go to Greenham sometimes?

**My mother didn't, but I think her friend did. Yeah.**

Yeah. Interesting. What do you think Greenham's legacy is? Its main - it's quite a difficult question.

Yeah. Well, I think - I don't think it can be underestimated. And I think it's, it's hard because the things that they fought for, and er, the things that they had to put up with our things that we take for granted now. So I don't know any different. However, in my personal activism, what I'm seeing is that it's facilitated, um not only the tactics and the methods that I think we see in a lot of the current movements - and I would say, examples of this are the fact that, you know, the women of Greenham knew that they were going to have to find ways other than directly petitioning the law, or the people in power, um that they had to come up with clever methods to sometimes circumnavigate the

law, and other times directly break the law, in order to raise awareness and push forward their cause. And I see for example, you know, and this is a different kind of era because I think a lot of the, a lot of the groundwork is sometimes steeped in the use of social media now, and I don't think it necessarily takes the place of physical action.

Interesting that you say that.

Yeah, but certainly when I look at say, the incredible work that's been done by the women in Ireland for Repeal the Eighth, I remember watching that kind of unfolding you know, live in real time, and seeing how there were women that wanted to fly over from America to vote, and other women online going, I'm going to put in £50 to pay for your flight, and you can stay with my sister who lives in blah blah blah blah. And the the level of organization was incredible, like oh I just cried every time I watched it. Certainly with the with the Stanstead 15, and a lot of what's going on with Climate Change, etc., for sure. But I would also argue, and certainly this is the area that I am active in is the #metoo movement, and all the kind of work that's being done around raising awareness around sexual violence towards women and men. And, and certainly non binary people.

Talking about the impact of social media really, weren't we...

**On campaigning, yeah.**

Do you think there's a double edged sword sometimes, because it's very easy to click your support, or forward a tweet and do nothing that actually involves a bit of activism?

I guess my feeling is, um that lifestyles are very different now - people are exhausted, they have very little time, um, you know, because of years of austerity, for example, I think it makes it very, very hard to, um to motivate yourself. I also feel that the sense of community has been eroded. And so I think we have been encouraged to feel very er, isolated, and also to focus on, you know, our individual kind of interests. However, I also feel incredibly um, er, positive about the new generation, the younger generation of women and activists in general, who I think are actually extremely proactive - surprisingly so, and are active in that they, they want to do stuff. And I see them volunteering at the refugee camps in Calais. I see them going out and collecting supplies for them. And I see huge turnouts at marches you know,

whether it's Brexit, or the Women's March, etc. So I feel that those who are, um of the kind of personality that would be more proactive, are still finding ways to do that. Um, and I feel like I'm probably in a little bit of a bubble in that the people that I connect with and the people that I follow, etc, are those kind of people. And I see that they've used social media in a very clever way, that just facilitates them being more effective in their campaigning. Um, so I don't know if that's the case, really, I guess I question how effective some of these petitions are. But then what I've noticed is, for example, recently, there were images that a watch um, company were using, that were extremely disturbing of, you know, a man's hand wearing a watch around a woman's throat, for example, and that was their advertising. And so, people started sharing this on social media. People started writing to the company, and they've now withdrawn that entire campaign. Now, let's not even get into how it got okayed in the first place. But the point is that online pressure changed that. And so, you know, I, I don't - would there be a Greenham common today? I don't know, you know. What I do see is people working extremely hard, and and succeeding in their effectiveness and certainly I've been part of and consulting on, um campaigns to ,er, advise ,er, people about the - can I start again?

Yes, of-course.

What am I doing? Well, I've certainly been involved in um, the consulting on the um, report that was er, done by Equity, which is the union for actors on sexual harassment in the industry. I've gone to the House of Commons, and being part of a debate on sexual violence for women, and how the criminal justice system is failing them. And what we've seen with the #metoo movement is that women realise that the justice system is not fit for purpose, and they're finding a different way to raise awareness and normalise conversations around this. And it is leading to changes, you know, and people being convicted. And we can see that now, and it's not happening fast enough. And there's still many, many changes that need to be made. But it's happening, you know, and that's because of campaigns both online and in person.

Would you say that was rooted in your early years experience?

I would say yes. Oh, that's made me a bit emotional.

I keep making people cry. It's awful!

**Damnit, I wasn't gonna cry! I really didn't, and I tell you why. I guess because when it's something as dark as sexual violence, you don't naturally know how to turn that into something positive, unless you've been given the resources before. And if, and the fact that it was a kind of an automatic, or a kind of an instinctive thing, to look for ways to raise awareness and to turn this into something positive, and to make change, and not just feel helpless or powerless, but to have a legacy of women, and examples of women, from my earliest years, that were able to affect change against what probably must have seemed like an impossible power structure, must be deeply ingrained in me. And so I didn't really think about it too much. It wasn't a cerebral thing, it was an instinctive thing. Okay, what can I do? What change can I affect? Even if it's very local, but that - this is happening to my generation. This is the new fight that we need to take on. And and how do we do that? And who has come before? And what have they taught us? What tools have they given us, and what freedoms, and possibilities, and opportunities have they given us that they didn't have, that they've passed - on that we probably take for granted - that we can now use to affect change, and what can we and what can we also create and offer the next generation?**

It's amazing what seeps into little tiny children, isn't it?

**Absolutely.**

Incredible. So important.

**Yeah.**

Really is. One question I wanted to ask you, do think younger people and sort of millennials, I suppose especially, are aware of Greenham?

**Um, I mean, that's quite a broad, you know, generation of people, you know, so the answer is yes and no. I do feel that there is a new feminist movement happening right now, there's a new wave happening. And, and I think I love millennials. I think they're wicked. I think they get a lot of stick. I think they're misunderstood. And I see a lot of them being extremely proactive and effective with obstacles that we never had. Um, so I feel like the women, the young women who are involved in this, in this new movement, and these new movements in general, you know, tackling all sorts of issues that their generation are facing, certainly climate change as well - navigating, you know,**

healthy relationships, and boundaries, and consent and all of that kind of thing, supporting refugees, um, etc, etc. Um I think they are to a greater or lesser extent. And, you know, this is what I mean. It's not necessarily that in my experience, um Greenham was talked about loads, but it was there in the culture in a very strong way. So I think that they will have been, some of them will have been directly aware of what happened at Greenham, and some of them will be benefiting from the legacy in ways that they probably don't realise.

Yeah, and the Suffragettes are included in our history nowadays, Greenham not so much. Why do you think that is?

Well, I think because the people in power at the time are still in power. And I don't think they want people to know how powerful they can be. Because they might affect the current power structures. Um, I think it's as simple as that. I think a lot of the kind of methods, and tactics are probably quite similar, but I feel like there's a stigma sometimes around the women of Greenham common - that they were weird radicals, they were kind of a glitch in our history, rather than the heroes, the heroines that they really are - who have directly influenced the movements that are happening now. Um, and I would go so far as to, you know, argue that they've directly influenced all sorts of things, you know, um how many women are in positions of power, you know, even military tactics, you know, training and what have you, um they probably won't get the credit that they deserve for now. Um I think this project is going to change that. Um, but I also feel that, um, it's taken a long time for it - the the legacy of the Suffragettes to be allowed into our history. And it's because there's so much distance, that it's safe for the powers that be to let it seep in. But also that, you know, women themselves have fought very hard to uncover and to retain that, that legacy in that history of women's history. Um so I think with Greenham common, what I imagine is that they're too dangerous to be kind of spoken about too often, and in a mainstream way yet, because they're still alive. They're still influencing things. And they've just been extremely effective. Um and I think there's certainly a pattern in the history of silencing women's effectiveness in history, and women's power. Um and I think that's what's happening.

But that will change?

That is changing right now. Yeah.

Definitely. I think that's all my questions. Is anything else you'd like to talk about?

**No, I think that's much more than I thought I would talk about! (Laughs).**

Maybe you can put it into your comedy?

**Oh, yeah! Yeah.**

One way of raising awareness - there's all different forms. It goes - that's why I was asking you if your mum had talked to you about Greenham, because all those old oral traditions and that sort of thing, it sort of all seeps out into the general consciousness.

**It does. Yeah.**

Well, as you say it does take time.

**It does. I mean, yes, certainly - I guess it's a difficult one because we were living it so it doesn't feel like you know, sitting down and going - what I do, remember is stories about my grandma's experience in Cyprus, you know, her and my grandfather were the first to set up a Workers Union there, you know, they were all working in, in a button factory, I think, and there was absolutely no limit on the hours or days they could work. And they were effective in changing that, and I think there was also a Coca Cola company nearby that was doing a similar thing. So, you know...**

There's a cultural line coming down?

**I think so.**

The genealogy.

**Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And there's a real pride. Certainly, what's interesting is that my grandparents would identify themselves as communists, and that's not a dirty word over there. Whereas over here, we'd say left wing, probably, you know, and or socialist may be a stretch. But in the Greek language, it, that's just what they called themselves, you know, and and there was a real pride in it. Um so, because that was one generation removed from my experience, those are the oral stories that passed down from - to me. But the**

rest of it, we were living it, so it's only now decades - a few decades later, I'm like, oh, this is valuable.

A different perspective, isn't it?

Yeah.

You can sort of look back.

Yeah. But also weirdly, I feel like it was just a given that the women around us, or the people around us were involved in it. So why would you talk about it - it's just life?

Yeah.

Do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

And we were surrounded by activists, and we were involved in, you know, certainly the protests in London or what have you. And we were living it. So you know, in terms of just the values of life kind of...

So do you think projects like this are good in making people who didn't have that privilege, really - of your background, become aware?

I mean, it's not just good, it's essential. It's essential. Why isn't it studied? Why isn't it in our history books? Why isn't it part of the curriculum - it's huge what happened, you know? And I think there's a there's a very concrete answer to why it's not, you know, that's a decision that's been made. And once again, it falls to people outside of the system to try and find an alternative way to document it, in order for it to then become mainstream, and that now, you know, I think what's really important is that there is a real push for women centered stories, women driven stories, stories created by women, about women, um and all sorts of kind of themes and issues that we're still grappling with, and struggling with today. You know.

Do you think there's a generational difference between how people think of Greenham women?

Um, I don't know, and that's because, well, the answer is yes and no. Because I imagine at the time that people were split, in that, you know, again, I was in this very liberal urban bubble. So, it all just felt brilliant and fantastic. But I'm sure those who voted for Thatcher, etc, you know, that part of England, which always surprises me, you know, as far as I was concerned, Brexit was never going to happen, etc, etc, you know. But the point is that there is an England out there that I just cannot relate to, that thinks in a very different way, and I'm sure their view on Greenham is very different. Um so I don't know - I would say I don't feel like it's really a generational thing. I think certainly the generation, my generation, the millennial generation of women who are involved in activism, probably have - I would like to think a gratitude and a reverence for what has come before us, and Greenham is a huge part of that. But I would say it certainly is much more to do with um, your background, your political beliefs - whether, the way you've been raised, what you've been told is normal and isn't normal. But what I would say is that that changes all the time. So what seemed radical a few generations ago just isn't now. Um, and that is, thanks to you know, the, the movements like the the Greenham, the women of Greenham common. And so, you know, that's changing as well, you know - I remember at the time that Nelson Mandela was being called a terrorist. You know, that's not how we see him now, you know, that's not how history remembers him. And I feel that's what's happening with the women of Greenham common - is that you know, they were seen probably initially in one way, um and now are seen very differently.