

Rosy Bremer

If you could just give me a little bit of background um, about life before you arrived at Greenham common in 1989.

Yes, it was. Yeah. So I was 18 in 1989. So I hadn't really got going on my life before I went to Greenham - I'd just done the usual things, going to school, sitting exams, and then wondering what to do next. I obviously grew up at the height of the Cold War, when the world seemed like quite a scary and insane place, with two of the world's superpowers threatening to destroy each other.

Did you personally feel um, not terror, but were you afraid that it would be a nuclear holocaust? It was imminent?

Um. My thing, really was I didn't feel an immediate sense of danger. But I very strongly felt I don't want people from another country to perceive that I'm part of something that's threatening their existence. Obviously we, we got the Western perspective which very much portrayed us as we are the strong guys. Um, and yeah, that wasn't something that appealed to me - to make people elsewhere that I hadn't met, um, feel under threat. And I imagined that they would be feeling scared. And that's something I didn't like.

Did you have any peace movements at all? Either by sort of being aware of them, or a member of CND, anything like that?

No, mainly because they weren't immediately visible to my little humdrum, everyday life. So, but it was very much an ambition - something that I wanted to do. I wanted to seek out groups that were doing something, and that were being very effective.

So how did you find out about Greenham?

Um, I had a couple of friends who somehow or other had picked up newsletters, so we just decided to go along, and um, see what was happening at the camps.

And what made you decide to live at Yellow Gate?

Well, um, the first time we visited we just went up for the day. And er, we then said we would come back for the Hiroshima day actions, which happened every year and were a big focus of the camp. So we arrived just before Hiroshima day in 1989. Um, as we arrived, we found the, the road outside the camp was blocked off. There was lots of police and an ambulance on the scene, and that was maybe half an hour before, a Welsh woman called Helen Thomas had been killed by a West Midlands Police horse box. So we became very involved in supporting the women, and Helen's family who the police tried to separate from the women. But Helen's mum was very clear that she wanted to meet the women that had been working with her daughter. And just the, the whole intensity of the incredible grief, and the unpleasant, dishonest way in which the police described their involvement in Helen's death.

How did they describe their involvement?

They, well they, of course, being the police and Helen being identified not as a woman in her own right, but as a lump with the Greenham women, they blamed Helen and said she was dancing in the road, which she, she wasn't, she was just waiting to post a letter, waiting for the traffic to clear.

Did she live at Yellow Gate?

Yes, she did. Yes, she did. Um. She hadn't been living there very long at that stage, I think, but it was around about a year.

So what did Helen's parents say about the police involvement, involvement of the military personnel - who actually witnessed it other

than the Greenham woman, and obviously the person who knocked her over?

Um. Well, I suppose they were the two main witnesses, um, obviously with very, very conflicting um, descriptions. Although one of the policemen - PC Conway, he resigned from the police because of the way that he saw other police officers, um describing what happened to her.

Did he do that at the time, or later on?

A few months afterwards. Yeah.

And what were the conflicts in witness statements and things, do you know?

Yes, the main conflict was the police said that Helen was in the road - that she was dancing, trying to portray her as irresponsible and careless. Um. Whereas women saw that she was waiting to go and post a letter. Um. There was a postbox just opposite the road, and there was a kind of island in two parts, so there was a hatched section where Helen was waiting.

Was it witnessed by army personnel? British army personnel?

No. So...

Was it just the police?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because of the geography of the base, the um, military personnel were all within the fence, and they wouldn't have had sight of what was going on.

And what happened at the coroner's inquest, later on - which would have been a few months later?

Yes, obviously willing women very much challenged the statements of the police, but the eventual verdict was accidental death. And there was, I think what we really wanted was an apology - some accountability for the police, and some honesty that what probably happened was that the wing mirror clipped Helen's head, um, and then she got dragged under. But those things we never got.

So they weren't held accountable?

No. No.

Interesting, and did her parents um, take take the matter on further after that?

No, no, they weren't. They were very dignified.

And grid stricken?

Yeah, but amazingly strong and as I say, very, very dignified. They had a lot of support from their community as well. But I, they they felt that that wasn't something that they wanted to pursue, though they felt they haven't got um, the apology that they needed and the honest account of what happened. Um. They decided that wasn't something that they wanted to pursue. Um.

How did the women at Greenham remember Helen?

Oh, she, she was always in our thoughts, she was always somebody that we spoke about whenever the media, or um, other women came to visit the camp. And we built very strong relationships with groups in Wales. And in fact, I think two women - when the camp closed down, moved to live in Wales, because of the strength of contact.

What were these groups?

Um, so there was the Cor Cochion Caerdydd, which I think is the Red Choir of Cardiff. They came down to support a lot um, whenever women were in court, or doing big actions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki day, and also in December, which was the anniversary of when the camp was set up.

And any other groups, or just the choir one?

Um, several peace groups, probably mainly based around Cardiff.

That's where Helen was from, born?

No, she came from a little village called Newcastle Emlyn.

I think I've heard of that, I was brought up in Wales.

Oh, okay. Yeah.

Oh, god, tragic for her parents. I wonder - they're not much alive now are they?

They could be - they're strong Welsh people. Helen was 23 at the time.

So she was very young?

Yeah. So she would - if they are alive, they'll be very, very elderly.

How long had she been at the camp for?

So I think she'd been living there for about a year, but very involved um, before that, and as a student and somebody working with Women's Aid, she was very politically active before that. And was part of a group that tried to stop Viraj Mendis, who was a - can't remember where he came from - Indian asylum seeker, maybe, seeking refuge in Manchester. Um, that the Home Office were trying very hard to get rid of and eventually

succeeded. But Helen and a group of her friends um, tried to stop the plane taking off when he was being removed.

And did the women make any physical memorial?

Yes, yes.

'Cause nowadays everyone puts flowers and that sort of thing.

Yes. Yeah.

What did they do?

Well, the sight of the peace camp outside the main gate, which is where Yellow Gate was, there is now a memorial to the peace camp as a whole. And as part of that there is, there's a memorial garden to Helen.

In her name?

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

And there's a board that explains about her life, and how she was killed.

It's interesting the policeman resigned.

Yes, yes.

On the grounds he couldn't...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, he didn't want to be part of an organisation that treated, a) treated people's lives like that, and then b) wasn't honest about it. And he said there was an orchestrated attempt to get all the statements to collaborate, which he didn't want to do.

Which was done by the police?

Yeah. Yeah.

And the police, nobody else was involved?

Yeah, yes, no, no.

Ah, poor Helen. Such a young girl as well, just horrible. How many women were living at Yellow Gate, roughly, when you arrived?

Um. It was a small group, um, fluctuating between maybe about six or eight full time women, and then other time, um, other women coming in on lengthy part time basis, and then other people dropping in and out. But when I was there it was very much - it was 1989, so that was very much when the media spotlight was not on the camp at all, and most people thought the problem of nuclear missiles had been solved and done and dusted. And sadly, even today, it's, you know, it's something that I think we should all be thinking about and be trying to do something about.

Well, it's very relevant in terms of Trump.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, India and Pakistan as well.

India and Pakistan, especially.

Russia.

Endless, isn't it. So, just so I'm clear in my mind, did you live permanently at Yellow Gate, or were you always going in and out?

So for 4 years, I was part time kind of, I would say 50/50 part time while I was studying, and then spending a year in France. But from 1993 onwards, yes, I was full time - so I lived there full time for 4 years.

That's a long time. Were you in a bender?

Um, by then the evictions - which were very violent and very frequent in the early days, that was in military terms, I think you would probably call that a war of attrition, which the women won. So the evictions were not so frequent. And by then we had bought a piece of land, which was in our name, largely through donation from Yoko Ono, as well as others. Um. So we established first of all teepees on that bit of land, and then a mobile home, um, and then we had caravans outside the main gate, which could be moved if necessary. So yeah, the um, the structures although not ideal were much more substantial than just the tents and benders in which women lived for years.

And the other gates, they were still in operation when you were there - Violet Gate...?

Only occasionally. Not full time.

No-one there full time at all?

No, no, Yellow Gate was the only full time one. Yeah. Yeah.

So what sort of women was there when you arrived? Just sort of - young?

A mixture - young, old, international, Scottish, English. Um. Several women who'd been there from 1983 onwards, one woman who'd been there pretty much from the start, who was um, by then she would be maybe early 30s - early to mid 30s.

Was Sarah Hipperson living there?

Yes, yes, yeah, yeah.

Thought so.

Yeah. Yeah. Suppose you didn't get a chance to interview her before she died?

No, but I listened to the Imperial War Museum.

Oh, yes.

Had her on

Yeah. Yeah.

Tape, and you can - it's open access, so I listened to her online.

Oh okay.

Which was fascinating. She was a very clear thinker.

Yes. Yeah. Yes. And obviously being a working class Scottish woman, she had a very strong oral tradition. So yes, very, very easy to listen to. With her very clear thoughts.

She was fantastic.

Yeah. Yeah. So there was her, and I don't know - did you listen to the other woman from Yellow Gate who's called Aniko Jones?

No, I didn't.

Oh, okay.

I didn't listen, but she is available. In-fact yes, I think I did.

Yeah. Yes, yes. And Katrina?

Katrina Howse.

Yes.

No, I didn't listen to hers, largely because there were masses and masses of tapes and I was beginning to run out of time.

Fair enough. Yeah. So Sarah died last November.

Yeah. Helen Johns died not so long ago, as well.

Yeah.

The international women, excuse me, um, where did they come from- what countries? Were there any particular countries they seemed to come from, or was it just random?

So they were, um, we had strong links with um, a Canadian woman who knew another Scottish Canadian woman. Um. Women in Japan - there was ongoing contact with women in Japan, obviously over the Hiroshima, Nagasaki issue. And I think possibly when women went to prison, they would meet women, international women in prison, as well. So it was very much part of our focus, that it was it was a worldwide movement to defeat nuclear weapons in all countries.

Oh, sorry, did those international women um, bring anything particular or different?

Fantastic resistance songs. Um, so we really fought the world's, one of the world's biggest nuclear armies with just ourselves, the air that we breathed, the fire that we cooked our food on, and amazing songs. Um. So yes, they very much bought their own perspective, they they bought, um, their solidarity and I think part of the psychology that makes nuclear weapons exist is because if you don't have a concept of what other people are like, and what their countries come from, um, it kind of makes it much easier to dehumanise people and undermine the value of their existence. So I, I think psychologically it was very important to make contact with women who were either in struggle in their own

countries, or were threatened by nuclear weapons. Um, so and also we had a lot of contact with Irish women, and we supported, yeah, we supported the women in Northern Ireland, who at that time were working against the military in Northern Ireland.

Did you go on any trips overseas yourself?

I personally didn't, but other women did. And there was an Irish woman called Margaretta D'Arcy, who is married, or was married to the playwright John Arden and they, together they did many anti-colonial plays, and she was fantastic for bringing drama and music, um, to the camp - which we incorporated that into our resistance. We would do circus routines in front of the main gate, while the nuclear convoy was coming out - which obviously it stopped the nuclear convoy, but it also is very good for keeping your spirits up -it was a humorous, playful way to defeat, yes defeat the military. Yeah.

And singing - did you sing to the soldiers the other side of the wire?

Well, we weren't so much singing to the soldiers. We were mainly singing for ourselves. Yes, I did. I have a really terrible voice. So I would offer to sing some of the songs, but I won't because my voice is so terrible.

Feel free, no-one will judge you.

No, it's fine. But it's, yes, singing was a vital part a) of keeping your spirits up, but also again, it's a psychological thing to change the dynamic of tension when you're faced with a big organisation, lots of men in uniform in front of something that has the power to destroy the world. Singing was another subtle way of undermining their power, and saying, on some level, whatever it is, we're not frightened by you. And you don't have the right to threaten our lives, though you're being paid to do that and everything's set up for you to do that - morally, nobody has the right to do that.

Do you remember any of the lyrics of those songs?

I do, yes.

Could you say some?

The one that really, I think, is associated with Greenham is You Can't Kill the Spirit. She is like a mountain, old and strong. She goes on and on.

And who came up with that? Was that just a sort of joint decision by everyone, or?

I don't know. It's entirely possible that it predates Greenham. But it's, you know, it's something that um, we took up and used um, on every nonviolent direct action that we did. Um. Yeah, I keep meaning to look up the history of that song. And I might have done at some stage.

Could be a very old folk song or something like that?

Yes, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

So contact with the other side of the wire. Was there much other than when the convoys came out? Or did you recognise faces and sort of get to know people - in anyway at all?

So I think we tried to keep our relationships - we - they were there to do a job of work. We were there to do a job of work. Sometimes the MOD police and soldiers would be violent towards women.

In what way would that be?

So there was a guy, um, I can't remember his name, and I think it was probably before the time that I went to the camp. Um. He was known as Thumper, because um, when women were arrested on the base and there were Portacabins for them to be processed, he, he hit women in

the chest before being interviewed, so yeah. All sorts of physical violence, and the bailiffs as well, they would um, be violent towards women.

Did you experience any particular act of violence?

No, no - apart from the worst form of violence, that, of Helen being killed and her death being lied about.

The women who were hit by for example, Thumper, did they ever try and take it on and make a formal complaint to the base?

Of course, of course, yes, yeah. And there were other instances where the squaddies not necessarily coming directly from the base, but say on a night out would come to the camp, and not directly attack the women - but just do things like urinate on tents, chuck things around, shout and kind of throw their weight around. It was always um, an uphill struggle to get the police to do anything about that. And frequently we had to do things like occupy the sentry box that was outside the main gates, so that um, people would come and investigate. And obviously, the investigations were very cursory, and strangely found that nobody ever did anything wrong or violent. Um, I do think there has been a slight shift in police accountability since the McPherson report. But that's not to say that police still don't treat protesters like that, and in fact, they very much do on the recent student loans demonstrations and anti-fracking camps. I think activists have come in for the same level of treatment.

Um, I've lost my line of thought. Oh yes, you were saying there was sort of bad behaviour, aggressive behaviour by the squaddies, did the locals bother you at all?

Yes. Yes. They also thought it would be a good idea to join in on the bad behaviour - just I think any minority...

Mainly men?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely. Some, some women would occasionally scream as they drove past, from their cars, but it, you know, goodness knows what they were saying - they weren't all in favour of us. But yes, I think it's just that thing about you're a vulnerable, marginalised group that the press - some sections of the press think that they can have a go at. Some people think that that means it's open season for abusing you, and kind of taking out all their aggression.

And do you think the fact that you were women had anything to do with that?

Yes, yes, yes, the misogyny thing as well - which seems to lurk just below the surface.

And when you went into town, to presumably go shopping or whatever, pick up supplies - what was the atmosphere like then? And did it change over the time? Because you were there a long time.

Yeah. So I think, I think probably the main change was from, say, 1981 when the first, when the camp was first set up, um probably until the mid '80s. I would imagine on the whole people's will to um, kind of have any energy for reacting adversely to the presence of women in Newbury had probably ran out by then. So going into town, yes, not a problem at all. And um, the cafe by the station, the Empire cafe, in particular was very supportive, and very welcoming for us, and that was a very much a haven.

Um. Did you know someone - maybe she was the Canadian American, someone called Janet Tafner?

No, she wasn't Canadian American, she got removed.

That's right.

Yeah, she's a Swedish woman.

Oh, she was Swedish?

Yeah. So absolutely, yes. I was there when she got taken from Salisbury Plain. Nobody would tell us anything.

Sorry to interrupt - were you on an action?

Yes, yes, yes.

Tell me the story, if you would?

Okay, so there's a village in Salisbury Plain called Imber, which was taken during the Second World War, and the villagers were told, you'll get your village back either at the end of the war, or by some date, I can't remember - whichever comes first, you'll get your village back, but they never got it back. And it was used as one of the places where the cruise convoy was exercised, and it was also used for training soldiers in how to fight with civilian populations, and particular at that time, obviously the population of Northern Ireland was in mind. So we would frequently go, probably as part of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki day actions, but also think on the anniversary of when the village was taken we went to open up the church to put flowers in there. And we would sleep in the church. So I think it was on one of those actions. We were all arrested, and one by one women were released from the police station.

And who arrested you? The British army?

Um, MOD police. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, um, I obviously there aren't people there all the time. But I think in the morning, somebody comes to check on the village, and at that point, they found us so, and then we went to Salisbury police station because that's the nearest processing centre. So one by one women were released, but Janet wasn't. So um, one of the women - Aniko Jones, she went around the back of the police station banging on all the windows and shouting for Janet, saying 'What are you in for?', and Janet told us then that that was immigration. So

she was held for some weeks in Pucklechurch removal centre, and removed. She was - she was removed on the wrong basis. And we, that was another case that we fought and won. She was removed for not having a valid visa, which um, was incorrect. Um. And she, after she was removed, she did come back and support the camp while it was still in existence.

Oh she came back?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. First of all, she had to go via Ireland, and then what Sweden joined the EU, I can't remember when - probably, possibly '91 or something like that. Yeah, and then she could come back, no problem. Yeah, so I'm, I still go and visit her a lot - although whether I'll be allowed to do that after Brexit. Who knows!

Let's not get into Brexit! I think the world has gone crazy at the moment.

'Twas ever thus, 'twas ever thus!

Just getting back to Janet Tafner, was there a vigil thrown?

There was. Yes, yeah.

To see her off, presumably?

Yes, yeah, yeah, we actually got right up. One of the women, in fact the woman who went round to the police cells and found out...

Aniko Jones?

Aniko Jones, yes, yeah. She got right up to the last security gates. Um. And said she would have got on the plane, only she got Janet's name wrong! But yes, I was very much part of that vigil which wanted to oppose her being removed from the UK. Yeah.

And how did the police treat you at the airport?

Um, they weren't, they weren't really fazed by it. I mean, you know, it was, it was just a small group of us on on our - you know, we were very smartly dressed, very polite, very presentable. I guess those police are kind of used to dealing with the public in a public place. So that slightly changes the dynamic. Yeah.

The other thing about that particular episode, was is it true that people felt they were being watched by the authorities?

People - well obviously living outside the camp, it's hard.

Yeah. Well, people at Greenham who went to see her off at Heathrow Airport, and supported her. I read somewhere that someone thought their movements were being watched - but you weren't aware of...

By that stage I was probably, now I wasn't quite living at the camp full time. But I you know that, I never thought it unsurprising that the state might somehow be monitoring what we were up to. So it's hard to distinguish.

But you didn't feel any particular kind of...

No, no.

What kept you going until 1997?

Um, determination, I suppose. I mean, um, I - it's hard to explain in a simple sentence. I love the smell of woodsmoke. I love nature. I hate nuclear weapons. Women seem to be very effective at fighting nuclear weapons, it seemed to be a never ending struggle. Um, I liked meeting women from all over the UK. I liked knowing that my everyday actions were centered around non violence, um, and against the nuclear state, and there's always something to learn, always something to do.

How did it start to tail off a bit?

Okay, so it's a very intense situation. And by the time I left, it was 1997. So there was a smaller group living there full time, under immense pressure. Um not many new women knew that the camp was there. So we didn't get as much support as we did, which means the work is much harder. And I suppose the energy started to run out.

Yeah, 8 years is a considerable time.

Yeah.

How many were left behind when you - when did Yellow Gate close?

I think Yellow Gate closed in 2001.

Was Sarah Hipperson one of the last ones there?

Yes. Yeah, yeah. So the the last people, the last women there were really Sarah Hipperson, Katrina Howse, Jean Hutchinson - who was instrumental in fighting the bylaws. Um. She took out a case against the Secretary of State Michael Heseltine, and the House of Lords in 1989 found that the bylaws which allowed the military to occupy the common were unlawful. Her and another elderly Scottish woman called Peggy Woolford, who had made many trips to the Soviet Union, and had actually been thrown out of the Soviet Union for opposing Soviet weapons. So it was really those four.

And how are organise yourself at Yellow Gate? Because there weren't that many of you - did you discuss in huge detail the actions you were going to take? How did that all work?

Well by then, no, you didn't need to discuss in much detail. Obviously, the nuclear missiles, the cruise missiles on the common would have left maybe something mid '90s maybe - anyway it was a gradual phasing out. So there would be actions to make sure that the land really did go back to - for use for people, peaceful purposes.

And what sort of actions would they be? The returning of the land?

Well, the police occupied one of the buildings and were, they tried to carry out exercises to deal with people protesting - so we would disrupt those exercises.

Was this just inside the wire?

Inside. Yes, yeah. In one of the few buildings that was up the main street - coming from the main gate. We had meetings with Newbury District Council to make sure that it did go back to common land, and we were discussing having a museum on the common but Newbury District Council's conditions for that were that the camp should close. So we said 'Don't worry, it's okay. We'll do our own museum.' Um, meanwhile, down the road at Aldermaston and Burghfield, um they were stepping up production of the Trident nuclear missile system. And every month the um, there would be a new bunch of warheads that were being transported by road up to Faslane in Scotland, so we would, we would try as hard as possible to disrupt those - that transportation.

How did you do that?

Well, we would, um, we would watch the base. And there were certain signs when the missiles were due to be taken up - there'd be certain vehicles lining up. Then it's just a question of going back each day, finding out when they're going out. And then when they are leaving the base, we would follow them by car.

You had your own cars, presumably?

Yeah, yeah. And when they stopped off at various bases on the way, which would be Marham and Wittering, then we would um, disrupt them there as well. And we would go into those bases and say 'Take the weapons away. We're here to stop you getting those weapons into a state where you can use them.' And on one occasion, I think it was RAF Marham or Wittering, there was a soldier who pointed his gun at women

and said 'Stop, stop, stop or I'll shoot.' And we asked, we went up to the Houses of Parliament the next day, I think, and asked Ken Livingstone to ask a question in Parliament about that.

The MP Clive Soley.

Yes.

Was he involved?

So Clive Soley was involved in the eternal battle for press accountability, and press responsibility. So he set up an organisation called Press Wise, which was for people who had been subject to incorrect, slanderous, libellous press treatment. And we had many, much experience of that. Most notably though, was an article that I think a subsidiary of The Mail, wrote about a woman living at the camp calling her 'Common scrounger', because as part of her income - as well as being a self employed artist, she claimed Jobseeker's allowance, and she fought a successful, successful libel action against The Mail.

Did she have to go right up to the High Court?

Yes, yeah, Yes, she did. Yeah. And she also...

How did she have the legal knowledge and cash to pursue that?

So there never has been any legal aid for a libel action. In those days, it seemed quite shocking that there wasn't legal aid available - nowadays, there's never legal aid, or hardly legal aid for anything, sadly. Um. Well, she had lived at the camp since 1981, been fighting court cases on a weekly, monthly basis. So, she didn't have all the all knowledge necessary, but she knew the right places to go and look. I think in essence, it's probably that not that complicated. You just need the confidence to take a case, the time to spend documenting everything, and the ability to string a coherent legal argument together - all of those which she had many years practice in doing.

What other media organisations were taken to court? Do you know of any other ones?

No, none were actually taken to court. We made several complaints to various organisations who we thought hadn't represented us fairly.

Generally, how were they representing you?

Hmm. Well, it's a subtle thing, isn't it, the way that somebody is represented? Um. So I think on the whole, probably fairly - quite fairly. There might have been, I think some women felt that our experience wasn't fully represented. Um. And obviously interviews would be truncated to focus mainly on the personal, women's personal lives rather than what we wanted to talk about the overall politics. So yeah, I don't, I don't really know what to say about the way that we were represented - some people wrote really good articles. There was one by a guy called Col Morton, who I don't know if he's still writing, but he wrote quite a good piece in The Independent. But mainly by 1989 and the mid '90s people seem to be fairly bored.

Was there a difference between the tabloid press and the broadsheets?

Very. Yes, yes, yes.

What were the big differences?

So the tabloids were really going for the um, kind of abusive, belittling misogynistic kind of representation of what women were up to. Um. And the whole concept of people non violently resisting the military. Whereas the, the broadsheets would do a kind of cleverer (laughs) job of belittling us sometimes, but they they would also do a fairer representation.

Were there, did the TV cameras ever come when you were there? They were there at the beginning when, the big Embrace the Base.

Yes, that's right. Um. Occasionally, yes. But mainly, in fact, I think exclusively local, local TV stations. Yeah. Yeah. And they would come for - they didn't really come for big actions. They would come for big anniversaries though. They liked the kind of commemorative let's look back at when lots of women were here angle.

And were you ever arrested? (Laughs).

Yes, yeah. On many occasions I was arrested.

For what?

So my first arrest was for a trespass - that was under the military bylaws that we later found unlawful. And I was actually de-arrested from that.

De-arrested is sort of? 'We made a mistake, go home'?

So, no, well I had never heard of being de-arrested, and strangely enough, it's never happened to me since. But there was a group of women - and it was a December action, we went on to the runway where cruise missiles would have taken off from had there been any reason to use them - or no, that was where they were transported in, on the runway. So we occupied the runway. A group of - it was quite a sizeable group, I think maybe twelve or fifteen women, so they were all, everybody else was carted off. And the policeman said to me 'Did anyone tell you you weren't meant to be on the base?' And I said 'Nobody had to, I knew I wasn't meant to be on the base.' And he said 'Any police officers tell you you weren't meant to be on the base?' And I said 'Err. No.' And he said 'Right, I'm de-arresting you then.'

I've never heard that term before.

No, no. I hadn't then. And as I say, never again.

Was he a MOD policeman?

Yes, yeah. Yeah, yeah. So all the police on the base were MOD police. And, some, sometimes when you're arrested on an MOD property, there will be processing facilities there. There are at Aldermaston and Burghfield, fairly small, but most of the time you're handed over from the MOD police to the civilian police. So trespass was my first action, and then criminal damage. I was arrested many times for criminal damage - things like cutting the fence at Aldermaston and Burghfield...

You'd got good wire cutters and bolt cutters?

I'm not the world's quickest. I'm not the world's quickest, but I do know how to use them. And after I left Greenham as well, I did several actions against the war in Iraq, and against the build up to the war in Iraq. So yes, arrested on many occasions - court for many court cases - obstruction as well, that was another popular charge for kind of a blockading kind of charge. And altogether, I've done thirteen prison sentences.

I was going to ask you to take me through the process of you're doing your action, and the police come along and arrest you. Where did they - were you put in a police van? What what happened immediately after?

And so if it was, if it was a Greenham arrest, if it wasn't a very big group then we'd be processed on the base - if it was a very big group and there weren't the physical facilities to hold us, then you would go to Newbury police station.

How did they get you there?

They..

On a bus or something?

Yeah, in - first of all, they were minivans, and then in the mid '90s somebody came up with riot fans, which kind of had separate encapsulated locked horrible cramped cells...

I've seen them at Notting Hill carnival in the past.

Yes, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Which are meant to be very dangerous if there's any accident as well. Aldermaston and Burghfield, again, smaller groups could be dealt with in those premises. If it was a large group, then we'd go to Reading and either be processed at the police station, and then dealt with either Reading Magistrates' Court or Reading Crown Court.

So were you kept in the cells overnight to go to court the next day?

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. So yes, yeah. Most of the time, released on bail - though in the mid '90s a couple of women were remanded. And I was once remanded from Kettering, I think, on one of the occasions um when we'd gone up to oppose the Trident convoys. I was, um, I think I had an initial plea hearing, which is the first part of the court hearing. And we were used to not standing up for the magistrates, to say we don't respect your laws which protect nuclear weapons and not women. So I did that at court and gave my anti-aristocracy, anti-monarchy habitual speech. And I was, I was reminded, and that I later found out one of the women who came along with me went 'Thanks a lot, you put him in really bad mood.' I went 'He? Who's he'. She went 'Lord, so and so the magistrate.' (Laughs). But I was released after a week from that when I said 'Yeah, fair cop.'

And you were held where?

I was held in Holloway. Yeah, yeah.

Could you tell me something about that?

And well Holloway was the same as it ever was. But also women were remanded for doing fairly substantial criminal damage at Aldermaston and Burghfield, I think. And...

When you say fairly substantial, what do you mean?

Quite extensive damage to the fence, that obviously the state puts a monetary value on things. Um. So prison, yes, it's a horrible place to be. My abiding memories of prison is it's just full of women who are very, very distraught, who have very fragile kind of precarious lives.

Where they supportive, the non Greenham, the non action women there?

Um, some supportive some, you know, some just stick their heads down and get on with surviving day to day, and don't really have much energy for other people, or finding out about you. But yes, on the whole very supportive.

So when you were taken from court to Holloway that was in a prison van, presumably?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

What was that like? Claustrophobic?

Claustrophobic, yeah, yeah. Um. Yeah, police, not always the best at driving, but I suppose the transportation sticks in my mind less than the actual prison sentence itself, I suppose there was a slight feeling of dread and anxiety on the journey.

What was the maximum length you did at Holloway?

So I don't think I ever did, as a whole sentence, anything more than 2 weeks, but I did receive several sentences of a few weeks at a time, and depending on when you were sent down, because you never did all of your sentence, but depending on when you were sent down, you could end up doing a very short sentence if you were sent down on a Tuesday, and then the next day for release. If it goes over a certain date, then you have to be released slightly earlier. So sometimes I'd be sent down on a

Tuesday, but actually released on the Friday, because my - the numerical release date would fall over a weekend where - when it wasn't prison practice to release people.

And were you searched when you got to Holloway? Uniforms?

Yes, yes. No, no uniforms. Yes, women were searched and strip searched as well. Margaretta D'Arcy led a resistance to being strip searched in the mid 1990s. In which case women would be flung into solitary confinement, sometimes. Um, yeah, so we, we were kind of treated in prison by the prison officers more or less the same as all other women, and you know, prison officers like anybody else are a mixed bag.

Yeah. Good ones and bad ones.

Yeah, yeah.

How was it, when you came out of Holloway prison into the sunlight - how do you feel inside?

Well, the first time um, it was, it was very, very strange - as disorientating as it is going into prison, you feel it, I felt a similar disorientation coming out. I remember thinking, why isn't anybody doing anything about the kind of, the lack of anything constructive or rehabilitative in prison? And I'd heard several very harrowing stories about women's lives. And I do remember thinking, it's kind of not right that most people aren't really aware that that's what the women who end up being in prison that their lives are like. Um. But obviously, that kind of gradually recedes, the more you get on with your daily life, but yes, of being released was very, initially very disorientating, and I suppose it's just processing the overall kind of intensity of the experience which takes, yeah, takes a lot of emotions.

Didn't deter you?

(Laughs). No, no.

Do you still think about it?

No, no, not very often. No.

Good. Um, the last convoys of the missiles at Greenham, when did they leave?

I think that would be the early '90s. Yeah, yeah. Probably around about '92/'93 or so.

Were you there?

Yes. Yeah.

Did they just slip away and that was it?

Well, no, no, no, they would still even when the inter-range nuclear forces treaty, the INF Treaty, the one that Trump and Putin have now gone back on, even when that was signed, um, cruise missiles were still being exercised. So every time they were exercised, they would be opposed. And there were also, at that time, Soviet delegations coming in to do inspections. So we would meet those as well and say 'All nuclear weapons are bad.'

And did you have a chance to talk to them and exchange any sort of...

Well they weren't - they (laughs) really aren't for giving their opinion. Yeah, yeah. Yeah and obviously, the last convoy that left, we very much celebrated that. And it was a gradual process of, as well, removing the security infrastructure around the base. When the police withdrew they took to locking the the perimeter fence up, and the security box at night, and we went in for sawing the chains off, and removing the main gate and fully opening up the common.

Do you think the women were considered imaginative? Because I've heard so many stories, and some great putting honey around locks?

Yes, yeah. Yeah, we also did things like on Salisbury Plain when the missiles were being exercised, we would dress up as sheep and give our names as Larry Jacobs. Which - yes, but it's a it's a communal imagination, I think.

Did they laugh when they saw you as sheep and giving your nam as Larry, or whatever, did they see the absurdity of it all?

I think on some level they did, I find it hard to imagine that anyone wouldn't. Um. But they kind of suppressed it, because they were in a role where...

They had to?

Yeah, yeah.

Oh gosh, any other things like that?

We wrote a book. I don't know - have you managed to get hold of a copy?

Is that the one that has every single action?

Yeah.

That's going right from the beginning? Yeah, I've loaned my copy to someone, but I think it's the one that you have.

It's from 1983 to 1994.

Rosy's just getting her book. Ah. That's the one. I've got this because, very useful. Well, I find it very useful not only just from sort of chronology, was to see the range of actions, that were taken, and the

persistence that was required. It was - I don't remember those photos in mine. Maybe it's a different edition.

No, there was only ever one. Yeah, yeah, quite a limited print run which sold out.

I found it on a book...

Oh, okay.

And bought it. Right, where else - we were talking about the international, international women from all over the world there. Was there any racism at Greenham? That you know, not necessarily when you were there, but...

Yes, there was. I think the racism was aligned with there was a bit of a split in the peace movement about nonalignment. Yellow Gate was strongly non aligned, and very critical of Soviet nuclear missiles. And there was, women at Yellow Gate thought there was quite a bit of racism towards a black woman involved at Yellow Gate called Wilmette Brown, and there was a....

Who was Wilmette Brown?

So Wilmette Brown was working with the Kings Cross Women's Centre, and there was a campaign called Wages for Housework, and that's, that's, that was her focus at the time. And yes, women, at the 1987 Soviet peace conference, there was a verbal racist attack on Wilmette, which women...

From another Greenham woman?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Or, I'm not sure if she was, she wasn't living at Greenham I don't think, but she was associated with Greenham. Yeah.

Do you know what form that - a verbal...

Yes, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's possibly something that could have been resolved at the time, but it wasn't. That was 1987, which was obviously before the time that I was involved.

That must have had quite big repercussions?

It did, it did well after 1987 the peace movement, CND, the Quakers in Newbury completely withdrew support for Yellow Gate. No financial support, no using of the shower facilities at the Quaker Meeting House.

The Quakers were very involved, weren't they?

Yes, yeah. But, but, yeah, but as a whole, they withdrew as well after 1987. So, yeah. So then we as a camp, we very much went it alone.

Gosh. So what do you think, precisely is Greenham's legacy really for future - for now, and for future generations?

Um, so the immediate legacy is no nuclear weapons on the common. The people of Newbury have their common land back, and people outside of Newbury can enjoy it as well. I gather there's a nature centre and ponies grazing on the land. Never again, I think, can a land based nuclear weapons system be used in the UK. Because they the essence of cruise, was that it would melt into the countryside. Nobody would know where it was and it would go all undetected. Not so, not so. So whatever nuclear weapons there are, they I think they can't be land based, so they would have to be sea based. Unfortunately, we haven't managed to stop the production of Trident. There weren't enough people aware at the time that Trident was being produced, not enough people felt the same sense of urgency as during the Cold War, to make them get up and do something about it. Um. So the next effect, I would hope is the huge inspirational effect that a group of non violent women fought the world's probably most powerful superpower, at that time, and won just through non violence. If people aren't really mindful of Greenham's legacy and what women did, how we did it, um, and how we

achieved that victory - at the moment that may well be another time in history when people do remember. I think history isn't linear, it's circular. Sometimes history and uncovered stories are very much forgotten. But then I believe there will be a time when people are looking for inspiration and may well come across the story of Greenham again.

Do you find people are still aware of Greenham, or do you think, or do you find millennials know about Greenham?

Are millennials young people?

I think so!

(Laughs).

I think they're the sort of 20 somethings. I think I'm Baby Boomers, I think Millennials are around about my daughter's age - maybe a bit younger, actually.

So no, I don't think they are aware of it. But, I think the tradition of non-violent direct action very much persists. At the anti-fracking camps definitely carry on in the tradition of Greenham. And there will be some women who.

Would you say that's one of Greenham's legacies?

Yeah, yeah, Newbury road protests, they were around during the end of the camp as well. So possibly the awareness of the camp at the moment isn't as much as it used to be.

Why do you think that is? It's part of British history, 20th century British history. Why are these young people lacking awareness of it?

Well, I think it's partly to do with each generation has its own kind of existential threat, an existential thing that it has to deal with and come to terms with. In the '80s it was the Cold War. And now it's very much

climate change. So I think the, if you're talking about a protest movement or some kind of force for social change, it's climate change. The question of how to relate to people coming from other poorer parts of the country that have every right to live here and settle here - the refugee kind of question - I think that's much more in mind, in people's minds...

Than nuclear weapons?

Yes, yeah. Yeah. And is probably something to do with the way that people's minds - having never fully appreciated what Greenham was about, and what it did, I think probably people see the fact that there aren't nuclear weapons on the common anymore. It's also because of Reagan, and Gorbachev. So it's a whole mixture of factors. But nonetheless, the legacy still lives on and I think Greenham was an internationally recognised movement, and will be so again.

How do you inspire these millennials to take part, do you think, in more direct action - rather than just clocking something on Twitter or whatever?

Well, I don't know. I probably am not the person to ask about that. I have, I was very politically engaged for a long time after I left Greenham, but I think you probably need to head over to Sweden and ask Greta Thunberg, who's the 16 year old who's kind of kicked off a whole environmental movement.

So you are you still politically involved in actions against things?

Not at the moment, no.

What did you do after Greenham?

So after Greenham um, I, um, I worked with a charity called Bail for Immigration Detainees, which got people released from immigration removal centres. There was one close to Portsmouth called Hasler. I

did that for 7 years. That's that's no longer, the Portsmouth office is no longer going. I was very active against the build up to the Iraq War and the Iraq war. Um. And then I had a daughter.

So things dropped off a bit?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I did, I campaigned for Remain during the EU referendum. Um. And I was for a while involved with the Labour Party after Jeremy Corbyn was elected, but I'm not quite so active now.

And what do you think your experiences at Greenham gave you in terms of going forward into those different involvements, if anything?

Oh, yeah, no, they, they definitely did give me a lot. Probably quite good - not necessarily legal training, but an understanding of how courts work, the kind of language that you need to use to do a good court case. So that was directly useful for when I was preparing and presenting bail applications at immigration courts. And obviously, I'd had the experience of immigration tribunals with Janet, when she was removed. Um, and an understanding of the way that groups work as well.

In terms of the group that you lived with at Greenham, and wider groups as well?

Yes, yeah. Yes, yeah. Yeah. Um. And an unshakable belief, even though I'm not putting that into practice at the moment, but an absolutely unshakable belief that individuals when they get together to take on an injustice, or a state authority, that they can fight and win.

Gosh, excellent.

I'm just going to turn that tap off.

Torture! What do think Greenham did for women, in a broad sense?

Well, interesting question. Some women got careers from the back of the work that they did at Greenham. It was an essential part of the women's movement. So it gave, it gave women a personal sense of empowerment, I think. Um. I'm not sure about the whole women thing at the moment, there seems to be very much a backlash against women being strong, powerful individuals. I, it's given women a very good model for getting together and speaking out about big, major political issues. Anything else...

Did you tell your daughter about Greenham? I don't know how old she is?

So my daughter's 9. Yes, I can't help myself. I can't stop myself from discussing politics, and kind of um....

Does she ask you for stories, though, about Greenham?

No, no.

Does she know you were at Greenham?

Yes, yeah, yeah. Yeah. And she knows that I've been to prison. Maybe when she's a bit older, I'll take her there. Um. But yes, I mean, my, just on a very tiny level, when she was very young and asking for pink things, I would say 'Why do you have to have pink things?', and she's known from a very early age that all colours are for everyone. Um, so, but I think, I think the way the feminist movement went, it did kind of, it didn't go down the route of really challenging the way that power structures are set up, and who benefits from them, and maybe trying to make - redistribute things a bit more. It kind of went down the route of there are some top jobs to be had, why can't some of the women have those which, you know, I guess that's a kind of valid...

It's part of it?

Yeah, but it's not, it's very much not the whole story, and it's not the route that I wanted to go down either.

If you could go back in time.

Yeah...(laughs).

Would you do anything differently?

Um. That is something I do frequently ask in myself. Um. I'm going to have to say no, because I had a lot of choices available to me at the time. I did have agency, that was - Greenham was very much where my heart was at. And even though it was hard, and leaving the camp was hard. I think I would still do it again. Yeah, yeah, definitely.

What was, I mean there were so few of you living at the gate, could you have not lived there and still achieved what you did?

No, no, no.

So place was important?

Absolutely, absolutely - not just place but structuring your daily life around non-violent resistance. It's very hard to do that. That's why the Occupy Movement, I think, was so successful and generated such an energy, because you know, it's not just the same place. It's like, well, yes, we're all in the same place, but there's nothing else to do. So let's do that job of work.

And do you think direct witnesses important, as well? Being there and seeing things?

Yes. Yeah, yes. Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Yes. Yeah.

And why do you think that's important?

Well, because I think the state always does a very good job of putting its view across and saying 'This is what's happening. It's like this.' But you absolutely need people to say 'No, I've been there, I've seen it and that's actually not what's happening.' So yeah, yeah.