

Ruth Nichol

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

(Blows lips) I think it was probably in 19sssssss....80. I don't know what I was doing before that but in 1980, I moved to Sheffield. I think I was busy doing other things before that. And er, I lived in a community in Sheffield, called Broomhall. And I was becoming more and more aware of cruise coming to to England, and I'd always been a 'ban the bomb' person. Oh, and my friend at school was was involved in that when she was a child, actually - with her parents. And yeah, of course, we went on demonstrations before that - long before that, in London I remember going on an anti Vietnam War big demo in London. Anyway, by the time I'd got to be middle to late 20s I was getting really scared, and this women's peace group that was in Broomhall - I don't know how long it had been going - but it seemed to be a good place to take my fears to. And I can remember going to the first meeting, and crying most of the time. And it was the first time I'd sort of faced it, I suppose in or, yeah, that it was it was such a big focus. And I was letting go of something - massive fears, I guess - trying to let go of them anyway. And it felt great having all the solidarity of the other women. And um, so I, I then became, well became part of that, and my best friend in that group called Sarah, was Sarah Green. And she, well I suppose - I know I went off, in at the end of '81 I went off to London to do a course - sort of theatre course (laughs) with Cunning Stunts, who you may or may not know.

No! (Laughs).

You don't? Ohhhh, you must! I should show you some posters and things later - Cunning Stunts. They were an absolutely brilliant group of women doing what I would call theatre of the absurd.

Oh, amazing.

And, oh, I just loved them to bits and, and I - well, that's perhaps a bit of an aside, but they, because they didn't focus on politics specifically, but they were very radical in themselves and they did, um, err, physical theatre a lot. Anyway, and Sarah - my friend in the group, she was an Olympic gymnast.

Wow!

And we did all kinds of crazy acro-balances and acrobatics, and I learnt how to do all this at this school that Cunning Stunts ran in London. As well as doing it Sarah - I learned a lot about it, and thought it was absolutely brilliant, and started doing that kind of thing and wanted - and we did theatre in the street, which was feminist, feminist based concepts and things. Oh god, so many things were going on at that time, so many things. Anyway, while I was on the school, Greenham women - well they weren't called Greenham women then - Welsh women marched to London. And I thought it was incredible, absolutely incredible, and came back to Sheffield, and after the course finished because it was only 10 weeks, and I think by that time Sarah had decided she wanted to move down to the camp.

Okay.

And so the women's peace group moved, moved her down, complete with a teepee that some men had bought but had given us, given to women. It was, it's crazy, but it was lovely. Took - we took her down and put up the teepee for her, and gave her a right send off. It was good - rituals and everything, for safety. So that was the beginning of me knowing about Greenham, and going, did you call it the women's peace movement?

The peace movement.

The peace movement, yeah, that was, that was particularly the women's peace movement that I got involved in. I had been known to CND marches before that, yeah.

And when was the first time that you went to Greenham to stay or was it...

I went with Sarah and the teepee, and do you know, I don't know exactly when that was, but it was, it was either the end of '81, the very end of '81, or sometime at the beginning of '82.

And what you heard about Greenham before that?

Ummm, mmm - I don't know. But Sarah was so interested in going, I suppose I heard about the march and women being refused any kind of, um, authority by the um, by the chief of the base - a bloomin' USAF bloke refusing to come out to talk to them. And so they chained themselves to the fence, and so I knew all I knew about that. Through contacts, I don't really know how it all - but we were women's peace groups, and the women in Sheffield were part of that, were quite canny - knew what was was going on. So I guess I heard about it.

Yeah. And do you remember the first time that you kind of went down to stay there?

To stay for any length of time? Because I stayed obviously overnight when we moved Sarah there. Um, oh gosh. No. So that would have been '82, let me look at me photos (gets up). Oh this is '83. This is Green Gate opening up. Um, April '83 was when I was already there, and knowing quite a lot of women that were at Yellow Gate, but they decided that they wanted to have some - so I used to go to Yellow gate then - or Main Gate as it was caught. I definitely stayed for a period of time, quite early on when the, ham, what's it called? I've got to slow down or I'll not remember anything. Um, there was a tree house built. Have you heard about that?

No.

Oh, right, um, in one of the tall trees near the Main Gate. And another friend of mine who was, at the time still an architecture student, here in Sheffield - she'd gone down with the Fallout marching band, and - which was absolutely brilliant. That was a mixed band, but she'd gone with them, and stayed on and had built a platform in the tree so that they couldn't evict them or move them on.

Oh right, so they had height?

So they had height, and and they were threatening to cut the trees down or something as they climbed up it. I can't remember what it was, but she - the amazing thing was she'd built this tree, or they'd that built this camp or they built this platform in the tree without using a single nail going into the tree.

Oh wow!

(Laughs). And it was really, really wonderful. I thought it was, I thought it was so radical and so creative.

Yeah.

Everything that was going on there was so different from anything I'd experienced before. And I loved it. And I stayed there for, I don't know - some days. And got to know quite a lot of the women that were there at the Main Gate, and that was quite early on.

And was at Yellow Gate that you used to go to?

No, I used to - well, yes, at the beginning it was only Yellow Gate.

Yeah.

And so this, these photos were when we were looking around for a site to be a bit of a um, I don't know what it was called sort of safety valve for women who had had enough of being interviewed at Yellow Gate and

Main Gate, and wanted somewhere that was a bit more spiritually calm. And so Green Gate was being created, Green Gate camp. Between seven pines it says here, so this is my photo of the seven pines, and my friend Teresa who was there. And then, oh I went to Denmark to talk about camp. So by April '83 I knew enough about the camp to go off to talk about it at, in Denmark. And Jay Greenham was born. Who was Sarah's son.

Oh wow! Was he born at...

He was born in a bender at Yellow Gate.

Oh wow!

Yes. Did you know?

I knew someone was born there...

Yes. Yeah. This is he, I wasn't actually there. I went down the day after I think, because she was a good friend of mine. I don't, I don't know, I can't remember if they still had the teepee then - I don't think so, I think they went in benders. So...

And Sarah was Sarah Green?

Sarah Green, yeah.

And did she name Jay after Greenham?

She named him Jay Greenham. Yeah. Yeah. It was pretty amazing.

That is incredible.

That's another child who was there, Elizabeth, um, that was Iona, who was a very stalwart member of Yellow Gate. And she never left, actually

Yellow Gate.

Was she there right until the end?

No, no, sorry. She didn't leave Yellow Gate when Green Gate was started, and when and all the other camps.

So when you talk about Green Gate, is that kind of the genesis of it, it was for women to go when they just didn't want the attention from people?

Yes, because it was down a little road. It was going to a gate, which was used a lot, but it was down a little road, and there were trees on either side.

Yeah.

It was beautiful. Really was beautiful.

And was there an ethos for Green Gate that developed over time?

An ethos?

Or kind of like characteristics of it?

Um, well, it was very green and very (laughs)...

Leafy!

I think it was regarded by some who were at places like Blue Gate which was very close, very next to the road, and hardcore women there, but very very, I mean everybody was wonderful, and everybody was wonderful, well there are lots of, lots of interaction that was mixed, but um, but Green was Green - the most green, I guess, and we didn't eat takeaways. Well, we tried to be healthy.

Yeah.

And um yeah, I guess that's what it - and it was near a big clearing. Trying to think, that's where a lot of the, I think it was near Green Gate where that was a big clearing. I can't remember, but I'd say it was it was the yeah, the health and safety valve. (Laughs).

And how long and often did you would you stay at Greenham?

Well, I, I never stayed massively long any at any time it was usually a few weeks. I was lucky, very, very lucky. Because I was working - I got a, on to a scheme and I can't remember what those schemes were called, but it was a scheme here in Sheffield at the city farm, and I was paid pretty much the same as um, income support - or whatever it was called at the time. But I, I continued to be paid even when I went off to Greenham.

Yeah.

The guy who was running the place and running, and he was really great, and wanted to support the camp. So he continued to pay me. And as long as I came back to do some work sometimes, in particular times when other people didn't want to work.

Yeah.

I was free to go down a lot, which I did. But how long - I guess two or three weeks at a time I was there, and I had a permanent - yeah, we were permanent. Our tents were permanent at Green Gate. I had a little round tent in the trees. It was pretty idyllic.

Yeah. And what year would this have been?

This would have been '82 - well, '83 the camp, that camp was established. I think was through - the winter of '82 through to the end of the winter 84, something like that.

Yes.

But in the summer, I wasn't at Greenham all that much, because I went off to um, Geneva - there was a whole van of us drove to Geneva, to camp outside the United Nations building there and set up a peace camp on this massive green. And I thought I had photos of it. I'm sure I have actually. Oh here's Jay Greenham.

Oh wow!

Lots of photos of him.

Is that Sarah?

No, that's me!

Is it?!

Yeah. And that's Babs. No, I have got photos of Sarah somewhere but not here. Sorry. Um, that's '83 - I was definitely there in the summer of '83. And he was born in '83. Yes. What am I looking for - photos of...?

Geneva.

Geneva, oh.

So how did you end up going to Denmark?

Well, people - women were being asked, the camp was being asked to send um, speakers to different parts of the world actually, because I've got a photo of one of my friends going off to um, the US and she, I think they did a mini tour. Talking about Greenham.

Yeah.

And they wanted someone to go to Denmark, to Copenhagen to talk. And I was very scared. And I realised afterwards I'm not a public speaker! (Laughs). They'd asked for, well, just for someone to speak, and I thought, I'll just speak from the heart. And that was fine. I did speak from the heart but I think they would probably liked someone who was more eloquent. (Laughs). Don't know - I shouldn't say that, I was good enough, but yeah, I was - I said I'd like to go at one of the meetings - because we used to have meetings, possibly weekly - can't remember - and lots of people went all over the place. And I hadn't been, so I volunteered and they said yes, yes, of course - you must go.

Wonderful. Did you have a good time?

Um, yes, it was all right. Um, it was it was, um, it was scary for me. And a friend did come with me. But yeah, they were, they were - they were very kind and they were CND type people.

Oh, okay.

It wasn't a women's group that invited us.

Yeah.

And I just stayed there a couple of nights, I suppose. And then went on to Spain. Since I got to the - I didn't speak in Spain though, I just had a holiday! (Laughs). It was good to get away some time.

And did you make friends while you were at Greenham as well - you said you went down with Sarah quite a lot, or Sarah was there when you were there, but did you make friends as well?

Yes, I did. Yes. Very much so. I met Babs there. I met Teresa there and, oh god, can't remember names - Skeeter, lots of people. Lots and lots and lots of friends. And I, I mean for years afterwards I used to go and see her in Ireland. But sadly, I don't see hardly anybody now.

Do you still see Sarah?

No, no, I've lost touch. It is quite tragic for me. I've let the life away from the camp takeover. And I do regret it. There's, there's was a young woman who'd left school to go to Greenham, who lives in Sheffield now. And I talk to her a little bit about about Greenham and things. But yeah, I haven't kept contact with - because people went everywhere, and everything was so, um, in the moment there, and I didn't bother to take contacts of people. Um, I tried to stay in contact with Babs, but she went back to Germany. And I lost contact with her. Carolyn - a French friend. She was a friend here before I went there. It was - this woman lives in Sheffield as well, Judy. But I don't see her particularly now. I don't know, and people have died - Aggie's died. No, I haven't stayed friends, but I was friends with this - this was a way that I shared my skills. It's a very poor photo, but I think you've talked to Tania, haven't you?

No, no, haven't talked to Tania.

Somebody talked to Tania. She's in Nottingham.

Yes. Somebody else will have talked to her.

Ah right. Well, you will have hopefully seen the really good photo that she's got of the early women's show, which was at the dragon festival. And that was me sharing my acro-balance - doesn't look like it there, but she's got a better photo of us all at the end of the show. We - I was teaching women to stand on each other's shoulders, or at least sit on each other's shoulders.

Was this at Greenham?

At Greenham, yeah, yeah. Did workshops - to be able to cut the fence higher up.

Amazing!

And from that, women were really excited about doing it acro-balance. So many of us were young then.

Yeah. So one of my other questions was sort of how the arts element of it fed into all your kind of non violent direct action?

Oh, completely completely. Because people - we were, we were around the campfires every night. And that's the only way to keep warm, and it's a way to be part, to be the community. And while I did make some very, very good friends there's one from Australia, I'm digressing again.

It's fine!

I'm going to digress - she came from Tasmania. And I mean, that was a really, really good soul connection I had with her, and she went back to Tasmania, and I I don't know what happened to her.

Yeah. What was she called?

Wooooooh - I do know because I was up here in, oh god here she is - Alis. Alis. Alis. Yes. A-L-I-S, beautiful woman, and she was interested in acro-balance, you know in acrobatics and things like that. And she was also - so many of my interests developed very deeply there. And spirituality was one of them. And, I did - would it have been my first rituals there? I don't know. I'm in the middle of several stories here aren't I? There's the spirituality, and there was something else - friendships.

And art.

Oh, yeah. Friendships. And art. A lot of people, a lot of women who went were very creative, but as a community, there we were living with nothing, really. And um, we had to make our own amusements. And we sure did! (Laughs). So we'd sit around the fire, there's one in Scotland.

Yeah.

And we would just share. I mean, it was so different to any other time in my life. Living communally and living openly. Um, sharing openly it was still a time of, um what's the word? Some would call it promiscuous, but others would not - what would we? It was no non monogamous, if you like. Lots of women came out as lesbians while they were there. I was already a lesbian when I went. But it was really home. A soul home, heart home. And it was beautiful, beautiful in respect of, I suppose staying at Green Gate, we were less exposed to the real horrors of what happened to a lot of women. I mean, we did have there women would go back to their benders and find shit - human shit had been put, deposited inside their benders and things like that. But, mostly we didn't get the harassment that people at other gates that were close to roads would have from the - what were they called? God, I forgot what we called them um, horrendous males that came and did these horrible things, just to be to be nasty to us. Anyway, never mind about that, but it was it was a way of cementing the relationships - being being subjected to so much harassment. And we, we had to find ways to um, lighten our lives and sweeten our lives. So every action we did was fueled by our closeness as women, and our outrage at what happened to us. And so a lot of um, silly things! (Laughs). Like, you know, you we've got to let the world know what's happening here. We've got to let the world know that there's a base here in Britain where nuclear weapons are about to be stored and were being stored in the end. And it's all over Britain. It's all over Europe, we've got to, we've got to do something about this, and draw attention to it. So we would create things that would um, catch the - be eye catching. And we went, and newsworthy. So one time people dressed as as, as bears - as teddy bears, and went and cut the fence and went in and had a teddy bear's picnic - you've heard of that?

Yeah.

Yeah, well, I wasn't actually part of that one. But I was, what was the question? Arts.

Arts.

Yes. It was involved in everything that we talked about. And we decided at the end of '82, which was really the beginning of my staying there a lot - in the middle of the winter, we decided we were going to go into the base and head for the silos, and how are we going to do it? Well, we we had to be incredibly creative and expedient, I suppose. Well, it was creative in that we - how are we going to dress - we talked about going naked, so that they would know that we were not terrorists that were going to be - we weren't carrying guns or anything. We thought that was a great idea. And then we remembered how cold it would be - going over at dawn.

(Laughs). Yes.

You know, so we decided we would wear - well I decided we would wear lots of clothes, lots of clothes! And creative - I don't know how you would call - I mean, I would call consensus decision making creative. Um, we would never do anything without the circle of women each sharing their views on things.

Yeah.

And so the fear of what what would we find when we went over the fence - would there be men with guns who might shoot? Would there be dogs who would attack us? And every woman shared her fears. And so everything was taken into consideration. And the deciding to wear lots of clothes was, was something that came out of that. And tabards. That's right. We all wore tabards - to identify ourselves as Greenham women - red, bright red things. And it wasn't the most creative thing, but it was the most creative in terms of creating icons for the photos.

We actually got to the silos, unbelievably, and sang, and sang on the top.

It's such a fantastic photo.

It is - that's me there, because I've got a motorcycle, padded motorcycle, suit on. I mean we don't look like we're terrorists do we - dancing...

and holding hands...

... and holding hands indeed. Of course. It's a strange photo because it doesn't look very far away, but actually it was quite a, quite a feat - we got over with, with ladders that we'd hidden the night before, and carpet on top of the of the razor wire. Every detail was you know, worked out and the fallout marching band, the women from the fallout marching band were there so that they would play once we were seen.

Yeah

And I don't know. I don't quite know how it was all planned. Because if we hadn't actually got there, and we'd been arrested before that, what - they were just there to play. Songs and music were really, really important to us. We would never sit around the fire without singing in some way. The songs that were made up while we were there are in that songbook is full of songs that women made up. But a lot of them are very short and repetitive chants, which were very, very powerful and very, very empowering to us. So, we we arrived - those of us that got there, there was a couple of women arrested on the way to the silo. And what do we do? Ah, well, and you know, we didn't plan it, but we decided to obviously hold hands and go around in a circle and sing, you know, I've said that before, but it was so incredible, and so powerful to do that. And, you know, we were full of songs in our heads that we knew, or chants and things and we sang them, you know, You Can't Kill the Spirit, and everything was just full of...

Joy?

Joy and creativity, yeah.

It's interesting you say joy - were you scared when you went in?

Oh, God, yes! As I say, it was the first time anybody had gone in.

Yeah.

And we didn't cut the fence because we weren't going to be criminals. So we went over carefully, avoiding razor wire and all the rest of it. And we weren't going to do any damage. And I remember running across the space between the fence and there, and like I say it was a long way. I was terrified, but I was also massively elated. I can't really tell you which emotion was stronger. But I was terrified. Yes, and I was really terrified before we went - I was still debating should I really do this? And what's going to happen to me? And um, you know - putting yourself in their hands was absolutely terrifying, because they were, they were, you know, they were only men, but they were the monsters and they had the guns. They had the power. And um, yeah, we were very terrified. But once we were there and holding hands, we just did what we, what we instinctively wanted to do, and, and yeah it was it was wonderful. And I was terrified when we were dragged down, and terrified of being loaded into these vans - what was going to happen to us, but we carried on singing, we sang and sang and sang.

Yeah.

And I think 44 of us were arrested in the end, we were driven off to somewhere I don't remember. Everything was such a - it was, I was so high from the adrenaline that I don't even - I think we were put somewhere in the base for a while, before we were taken off to all the different police stations where there were cells in the Thames Valley. And I went to Maidenhead nick, I remember, and there were a lot of women from Brighton who I'd never met in the cells there with me. One of them was Imogen, who I think I'm holding hands with here. And I didn't know her before, which was, well it didn't matter. It didn't matter because you immediately bonded. There was a lot of bonding that went on. And we sang from - we were all in separate cells in Maidenhead nick, and we were there for three nights. Because we did it on New

Year's morning, and nobody was working in the magistrates courts or anything. So we had three nights of egg and chips every night, because you have to eat. You have to feed your prisoners. And that's because we were, we were I was vegetarian and there wasn't much choice in the local wherever - near Maidenhead nick, and we had this congealed egg and chips, but you know kept us going. I did lots of yoga, I remember that - in the cell. And we did lots of singing, and kept in touch with each other through the through the voice. It was lovely.

Yes. How many times were you arrested when you were at Greenham?

Um. There was - that time was my first, and I was arrested for criminal damage when we cut the fence. I think the end of that year, we did. It was Halloween and we did the witches - got a photo of that as well. Cutting the fence. It might have been only twice but I can't remember. Oh dear, that's terrible I can't remember. Yeah, possibly twice. Which wasn't very often really. Could have been more. I don't remember any more.

Yeah. And when you were, when you got onto the base, how did the men on the base treat you when they saw you? Were they kind of baffled, or was it a more stern reaction?

Er, they were - that was still early days still, relatively speaking - end of '82, because it began in '81. So I don't think they'd ever been confronted with so many women, and doing what we were doing and they were baffled. Yes, they were baffled. Definitely. And I say they dragged us down. They did - you know, if they wanted to, they could be as harsh as and cruel as they wanted. But mostly they were still. Er, what's the word? Well, we had an 84 year old woman with us. She went over - Nell, and I think she was 84. I might be exaggerating, but we were all ages, anyway. And they were respectful, in some ways, of us. But they could do what they liked, if, and of course it was all non-violent what we did, so nobody fought back. We all went heavy and there was no question of us being violent, but there never was right to to the end when there was a lot of, a lot of extreme violence from from the police.

But as far as I know, nobody was really seriously hurt on that one. And, yeah, they all - they all have to think creatively and what are we going to do with all these people and they did it. And found places for us and all the police stations, but of course at dawn on New Year's morning nobody was quite awake! (Laughs). But we were. We were very awake.

Was that part of it as well that you knew that people would be drowsy on New Year's Day?

No, it was more that we knew there wouldn't be much news. That's why we did it. That would be the best time to do an action that would create a lot of publicity. And we got splashed across all the, all the papers. It was brilliant. Really, really good publicity that, yeah.

How did you find people in Newbury in general? How the public reacted to you after that?

Um, after that?

Yeah. Or in general, maybe. When people knew you were a Greenham woman?

Um... I didn't... I got, I was used - as a woman - I was generally used to being treated um, with disrespect from men, and I didn't go into Newbury that often - just for swim and a shower. We went to the - I feel like I was quite isolated from everyday people. Um, and in Sheffield when I came back, there was lots of hate-ing. It was - a lot of people in Sheffield supported us, very much so. But I didn't. I don't think I got treated any worse than I had been before that. There was always general abuse of women and of lesbians, in particular. From men, but not - nothing worse. Because I was a Greenham woman. And they didn't know, sometimes.

Picking up a bit more on nonviolent direct action - did you feel, how did it feel for women? Were they able at Greenham to define their own contributions to actions like this?

Yes. Yeah, yeah, like I said it was we always did things by consensus. And um, it was in - everybody's voice was considered important. Is that what you mean?

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, it was it was part of, part and parcel of everything. I'm just trying to think if anyone suggested anything that people just sort of didn't take up for any particular reason. I mean it got so big that there were actions happening that you didn't always know about - round the camp by the end, but not usually actually. You'd hear they're gonna go, in or they've gone in (laughs) round the other side of the base, you know it was nine miles around. So considering how primitive communication was in those days, things got round very quickly. It was all word of mouth and the action for the 10th? 12th of December '82, when we surrounded the base.

Was that Embrace the Base?

Embrace the Base, yes. That was um, I mean everybody could very much contribute their own thing, things that they want to hang on the fence. It was, it was, it was beautiful. It was exquisite in the way that, the way that every every woman's contribution was appreciated, if you like, there wasn't there were never any rituals that were led by a priestess. Apart from when Starhawk tried to do it, and got lots of (laughs) - I don't know if you've heard you've heard about that?

No, no.

Oh, that was funny. Anyway, that wasn't specifically an action. It was a it was ritual, and she got sort of - we had the, she was trying to lead a ritual as the priestess and it wasn't an action, but it was, you know, it was still an action because we were there doing it at Greenham, and oh actually, I think we were on Tilbury Hill at that point, but some women were not impressed with her being the leader and got out toilet rolls and

were wandering around the circle with these toilet rolls, decorating it with toilet paper. It was very, very funny. So that was sort of how much respect was given to leaders. Um, we did not have a leader - if ever the police or anybody came to talk to women, and they wanted to talk to our leader, um there wasn't one.

Yeah.

So they were told in very uncertain terms. And so everyone's contribution was valued. And that was, that was really good - 'course there were some women that took to it and wanted - no, I don't know that they wanted to have the limelight. Perhaps they did, perhaps there were some that did, but some were more eloquent than others and, but I - as someone who didn't feel very eloquent, didn't feel I couldn't. And I couldn't speak out. And like I say, I was, I was, I went on the Denmark trip, which was a fantastic opportunity. And yeah, I think it was, it was beautiful the way that politics were created by women there. If you like - we defined our own, we developed our own...words are not coming to me. But we developed our own ways that were - they weren't unique because America would had the Seneca women's peace camp, prior to Greenham. I'm not quite sure what was going on in Seneca - perhaps it was a cruise missile there - I can't remember. I know that it was a place where Native American people who were very powerful, but so it was, the peace camp was - you know, I don't know what it was based on - why they had the pace camp there, but they were before Greenham I'm pretty sure. Um, but yeah, it was. It was extraordinary and I think that's one of the reasons why it was so successful - that it was the first of its kind, certainly in Britain and internationally - it was very much an international camp - people came from all over the world to visit and be part of it. I'm digressing I know, but it was, it was an amazing opportunity to for new things to emerge. We had visits from Peggy Seeger and Joan Baez and, and often they came to Green Gate to join to join the circle there in the evenings, and sang and things. It was lovely. Because we were quiet there (laughs). So we were lucky.

And how did it feel to watch the camps grow?

Fantastic.

Yeah.

I was, I was so impressed with the women that would choose to go to the new gates and open them up as camps. And occasionally, I mean not occasionally - I would, I would visit them, but I don't think I slept a single night away from Green Gate when I was there. Because that was my home while I was there. I might have slept at Yellow Gate, because I had close friends there. And I slept at Orange once. And Indigo. Indigo was the first gate that I - when we did the action - the Blockade the Base, the day after the Embrace the Base, it was the first time we managed to do it. I went with Sheffield women to Indigo Gate. And I think it was called the Pedestrian Gate. Yeah, because people had walkie talkies, women had walkie talkies. And um, we heard that the whole base was - we heard we heard that the whole base was embraced. But we also knew that everywhere was blockaded, at some time through the walkie talkies, and it was just really, really important that it was - that the thing was growing and that it was working. No, I really liked it. And I admired women who were doing the much more courageous thing really. I didn't think of it in that way. Yes I did, I did I thought they're so, so brave! (Laughs).

And did you watch kind of the different gates personalities emerge as well?

Yes, I suppose so. Yeah.

And how - 'cause I've heard previously that Blue was more punky.

Yeah.

And things like that. And Green - as you said, was much more spiritual, green and healthy and things like that. And how would you have defined the personalities of each?

Oh, what you've just said is probably about as far as I'd go in defining personalities. I'm trying to think what I would describe Orange as. I can't. I didn't think of it particularly - each thing separately, because like I say I was there earlier. And I, we would go to different gates for meetings sometimes, and I'd go round and visit the gates but I didn't stay any length of time really at any of the others.

And how did it feel for all those women to come down to Embrace the Base as well?

Ah, fantastic.

Yeah.

But it's looking back on it when I think oh my god, how did we do it? How did it happen that everybody knew about it when, when it was all secret. And every woman was supposed to tell ten other women and they were supposed to tell ten other women and it really worked! It was all word of mouth. Bloody amazing!

It is. I think as well my fascination with it is - yes, how did you do it? Like how, just from beginning to end, what was the decision making process to do it? And then how did you work it out? But also how, how did operationally did it work on the day? So like a really administrative question.

Yeah.

Logistic questions I find just because it's, I think, was it 10,000 women?

30,000 women.

30,000 women that were there, and that's a football stadium and trying to organise that amount of people.

Well, it was all - I can't think what the word is. It was all organic. It really, really was. Somehow - we had walkie talkies on the day. Um, you must have seen the photo in here of... (looks for photos). There they are - 'Message received. The base is surrounded.' And those are all women who were staying at Yellow Gate, at the Main Gate. I mean this was before the other gates were - there were people living at them. So I'm guessing - I don't know, whether women were directed in their coaches to go and be left out at other - around the base. As I say, Sheffield women went to Indigo Gate. We, or they must have named the bases by colour before that day, and um, well perhaps for that day - that was the logistics (laughs). Simple as that! 'Send them to blah blah gate, and send them to blah blah.' Oh, Indigo or Blue or, Turquoise gate somehow - it was never a camp. And it was between Blue and Green, obviously. And women were there - somehow had to trudge through all the all the trees and the bushes and everything to get there. Because there was no road that way, or no path even. By the end, there was a path all the way around the base that was very, very clear. But I would say that there must, must have been somewhere and I didn't know it, how the walkie talkies must have told people where to go, beforehand.

And did you - you travelled down on the day, did you?

I travelled down on the day. Yes. That was my sort of first big, big action. Yeah.

And how did you hear about it? Did you hear from women on the base, or was it that kind of thing of one woman tells ten women and you found out that way?

But I did have Sarah there already. Um, sorry shouldn't be eating and talking at the same time. Mmmhmm. Yeah, I just um - somehow we all knew that Sheffield women were going to go to Indigo Gate. I don't know!

It's fine.

(Laughs). I can't remember!

It's fine. And other big actions that you were part of, so you talked about Embrace the Base, and one other - were there any others?

Yes, yes. We had - (looks through photos), that was the beginning of Yellow Gate, Green Gate. Then... this was Yellow Gate, or was it? Portland Down - we'd go off to different places - that wasn't a big action, that was just visiting another camp at Portland Down. Oh, it looks like, ell, I didn't necessarily take photos of everything. But this was a sort of action. It was certainly covered by the news - the Dragon Festival, and women had been invited to make pieces of material decorated in whatever way they wanted into a dragon. A long piece that was, um Katrina was a brilliant artist and she created the dragon's head. And that's the goddess head. I haven't got a picture of the dragon. There's pictures missing, so I don't know what happened to them - where I took them - what happened, but sadly they're missing. And so I took part in the in the show, the early woman show at the Dragon Festival and we went round on a big flatbed lorry. I wasn't one of the organisers of anything, I'm not an organiser, really. But I was an organiser of the show.

Yeah.

Yeah, and Tania, who - from Nottingham, she was the sort of theatre person who made my acrobatics and acro-balances into a show, and included various patriarchs - as our enemies that we had to fight through our non violent actions! (Laughs). Yeah, it was lovely. So I was talking to the dragon festival - Nagasaki Day, that wasn't an action either, but I was part of bringing the goddess back to Yellow Gate from wherever she'd gone at that time. Golly Gosh. And then I went up to Scotland. Oh then the was the July blockades - the 4th to the 8th. We, um blockaded the whole - tried to do it for seven days. I thought it was seven days but 'Blockades - 4th to the 8th', how many days is that? 4,5,6,7,8 - 5 days.

What year was that, do you remember?

That was 1983. Um, '82 or '83 - this book. I don't remember. But we, there was 13 of us drove in a minibus - after we'd finished the blockading, we all drove up to Scotland to the women's peace camp at - oh god, Rosyth.

Yes.

Yes. And (laughs) I can remember, we met all the women and they were performing, they were rehearsing a show that they were doing. And then we were doing a die-in there. And I remember I walked into a lamppost just before that, and had a huge egg on my forehead. And so when that, I didn't get arrested then, because when I lay down to die, I decided it wasn't a good idea to get manhandled. So I just got up and walked away! Feeling a little unwell. So yeah, that was that was one other action. And then we went off to the wilds of Scotland for um, a birthday, and camped there, and that was in the west of Scotland. Let's think, what happened after that? What number was that (looks at photos). I never counted how many I was involved in. Oh, this was cutting the fence at....

Halloween?

Halloween. Yes. And I joined up with the Sheffield woman - don't know where we were, but it was certainly wasn't Green Gate. This is one of the exposed bits of the fence.

Yeah.

And I'd done the workshop in sitting on women's shoulders before that for anyone. And so I that's when I was arrested for criminal damage. Yes. All the Sheffield women have got witches hats, and there's no fence!

They're just standing there!

Yeah. Not knowing what to do.

Yeah.

That was often what happened. They didn't know what to do with us.

Yeah. And climbing.

Yes. I'm not sure what he's doing there - trying to stop us. Push us over!
Yeah, yeah, it is weird isn't it? 'Cause they're squaddies. I think they're English - are they MOD? No, MOD wouldn't look like that. They must be Americans. Yeah, they weren't allowed to engage with us at all - the Americans.

Yeah.

So they just stood there and watched us. And then I came back. Oh, that's me and my arresting officer but for some reason or other I haven't ... (laughs) And then I went off.... Yeah. We did a die in there. I think. This is all in Sicily. That must've been a different time. Oh, post Geneva, no, we haven't got any - I don't know why I haven't got any photos of Geneva, but I did have a photo of it. And that was - that was an action by setting up the peace camp really, it wasn't - and there was lots of publicity for that.

Yeah.

I think we might have done something else as well. But I don't remember. And this was actually being at Greenham again. And there's Jay Greenham, grown into a little boy. What on earth - and this was must have been when all the the bailiffs started coming, and yeah, there was lots and lots and lots of, well, police and bailiff action but not women led - here's a blockade at Green Gate, and it was the porridge blockade. They were trying to bring things out of the gate.

Yeah.

And we'd made a whole load of porridge - as much as we could in all the receptacles we had that morning - and threw it at the windscreens of the vans as they were coming out, so that they couldn't drive! (Laughs). It was very good, very good action that one. It was things like that that we did you know, just did, that I was involved in. There's a squaddies telling - about to take notes, getting out his pen, and that's - I've forgotten her name, an American woman who was copying him. I can't remember. This is all of the camp. More blockading - Orange Gate, I was helping blockade in '84 - what action that was, I don't know, these are Sheffield women who had come down. I often joined them when they came. That's me there, and a dog! Joining the blockade, oh and then I went off to Ireland, Northern Ireland, to join in the annual support for women in prisons.

Yeah.

We had a lot of allies in the pit closures campaigns.

Where are you here - is this still in Ireland?

This is Northern Ireland. Yeah. I went to Derry. See she, these two are from Greenham, I was with them, and this one was from Sheffield. So it was all mixed up at that point. Very photographable, I didn't take a lot of photos at Greenham. But every so often, I did. This is April '84 again, and this is when they were doing some horrendous burning of the camp.

Oh god.

Lots and lots of - all the benders were burnt down, and they put up all these fences to stop, and then they put, I think that was when they put all the blocks of concrete - I've got a picture somewhere. Waking up in the morning after, after the burning of the benders and she's been sleeping in a bus shelter. And this is women just all sort of recovering from the night.

Yeah.

Oh these are these are the fences all going up. I'm trying to find the photo of the lumps of concrete that they put in, but I can't see it. This is all the devastation. They destroyed all these trees and things, while they were destroying the camp. This is still all of that. But one day I'll come to a photo of the blocks. No I won't. This is Jane coming to Green Gate, because there was lots of stuff in the clearing that, we were, people brought things from the camp to Green Gate, where there was lots of materials they could use for re-setting up, camp. Yellow Gate, because we had women - all sorts of skills that women at the camp had, and this is a doctor who - Jude was going to go to Nicaragua to talk about Greenham, and she was getting her inoculations.

Oh yeah!

At the camp, by a doctor - one of our people. I don't know where she got it from. She was an Australian woman, doctor, but she got the gear for the inoculations. I don't know how. Or was she Australian? I can't remember - I haven't written her name. Oh, Katrina. That was her name. Perhaps she was an English doctor, but her partner was Australian. They certainly were - I don't know. So I haven't got any pictures of the flags. I swore I had them. But never mind. And then I was part of Sheffield.

Is that you?

That's me. Yes. Setting up a camp on the moor here in Sheffield, to bring attention to the all the evictions that were happening at Greenham.

How did you feel people reacted to you when you did this in Sheffield?

Um, lots of sympathy. Lots of lots of sympathy, and interest in what was happening. We managed to spend the night there without any serious harassment.

Yeah.

So, yeah, I felt I felt very safe there actually, with the other woman. Yeah, there was a lot of sympathy. Unbelievably, no, not unbelievably. It was - Sheffield is a good town in terms of politics, or it was then and obviously there's lager louts and normal kind of abuse, but not, nothing that felt unsafe for me when I was there. I think one time I chained myself to the, to the gates of the city hall for some reason! (Laughs). Drawing attention to the evictions possibly - I don't know. I don't know if we've got any more pictures. Okay, um. Yeah. What was the question?

I was gonna move on to bailiffs and talking about those, and how that felt or how...

Well I, that's when I pretty much left. I was there for the sweet time! So I went to Yellow Gate after it happened there. That's what the photos are of. And I went to Green Gate, well I was at Green Gate, but I, yeah, I left soon after that, and I don't know whether it coincided, or whether the evictions coincided with me deciding that I didn't feel safe enough to stay after that, or whether I was just tired and wanted a break. I think that was probably a mixture of the two - I thought oh this is - I don't remember feeling like I was leaving them in the lurch, and I don't remember feeling that I shouldn't leave then. Or that I should leave then, I just knew that I'd had enough.

Yeah.

And, I still went and visited.

Was Sarah still there at that time, or had she left?

I don't know when she left. Can't remember.

This is a question more about the end, and how do you feel - if at all - the camp was to see infiltrated or sabotage?

Oh, I, I don't know. I know that the Wages for Housework women got very big at Yellow Gate, and I wasn't happy about the politics, and I wasn't happy about their trying to take over. And yeah, wasn't, wasn't my, I mean, I just wasn't somebody that wanted to be involved in - I was going to say disintegrated, but that's not the right word. But didn't want - our politics were embracive of anything to do with peace. And that was another, that was something else - that was something different the Wages for Housework lot. And I, I didn't feel secure enough in myself to to know how to deal with it. Is that right?

Yeah.

Something like that.

And what were Wages for Housework - incase people don't know.

Um, well, they, they were an organisation that, um, I don't know exactly.

Yeah.

I don't know.

And how did their politics differ from yours?

Um, well, they were, there was something aggressive about them. That I wasn't happy with. That's the main thing, it just felt less creative and more aggressive. But I can't tell you very much about it because I didn't follow it through.

Yeah.

I don't know what happened to them or, or anything like that, I'm afraid.

And, and in terms of Greenham's legacy, in either the peace movement, or the feminist movement or the LGBTQ, how - what do you feel the legacy is, if there is a legacy?

Hmm. Well, I think it definitely has a legacy in terms of women are powerful and can do powerful thing.

Yes.

So that is a legacy for all feminism and all women. It was unbelievably powerful for anyone to go there and see how, um, how women were working together to empower each other, and empower themselves and to create a powerful resistance to things we didn't like. Particularly the nuclear threat, and and male violence. I don't think Wages for Housework were against male violence. I'm sure they were. But I'm, you've really made me feel like I don't know enough about what they were.

No, no.

But I was definitely uncomfortable with them. So the legacy was, yeah - a massive inspiration, if anybody finds out about about it. When people know about it, it's an example of a very successful, successful women's stand against things that we were not happy with at all, and a totally different way of organising, and being than traditional male politics and structures of - that are quite alienating for lots of women.

Yeah.

And so it's about listening to each other, and valuing each other, and supporting each other, as well as having your own personal beliefs and and things. I think that is a major legacy, and the creativity within the - against the...

The protest?

The protest, yeah, yeah.

And you kind of answered this question anyway. But how important was it to you, and how important does it remain, that it was a women only space?

Oh, for me it made all the difference in the world because as I - my first job was as a teacher, a primary school teacher, and I tried to get involved in the union, and I just found the whole setup completely alienating. I didn't know why didn't feel strong enough to speak out, because people were putting each other down all the time, and squashing, squashing, original ideas. 'Oh no, we done that. No, no.' Just not interested in each other as people, and the politics within Greenham and the women's peace movement in general, and the women's liberation movement in general, was about empowering ourselves and each other, and I found I found that very, very, very helpful - and missed it in recent years. I miss the companionship and camaraderie of collaboration. I need - I know I need to do more of that again in my life, and I don't mean that - that did work for me after I left Greenham, I would do creative things, we were part of a women's circus that performed and, and did workshops for other women and things. I had such a good time doing that. And yes, always wanted to do things in collaboration. I am I am doing some art on my own now, but I do prefer collaborations and doing things together. It's much more inspiring.

Yeah. And do you feel that has its genesis from your time at Greenham?

For me?

Yes.

Yes. Yes. I'm trying to think if I was anything before that? Well, the women's peace group in Sheffield was the beginning of it, but nothing like the scale of being at Greenham and living together.

Yeah.

That was so special.

Yeah, I can imagine.

Yeah.

Because I feel women's only spaces are very important to me. I, I got into writing - I'm a writer - by doing a women's only creative writing class. And I felt that, and then when I went into mixed spaces again, I found it very hard, because - you're right, trade unions are an example that I have in my life as well, of finding it actually quite difficult. Having solidarity with a trade union is something that comes very naturally of course, but when I'm actually in that space, I'm like you guys are unbearable, it's just step by step, very methodical and very by the book and I find that very difficult to deal with a lot of the time. A women only spaces I've found a lot more collaborative, a lot more empathetic and understanding, and yeah you're right - getting about knowing the person, and about things like that, rather than no even pigeonholing people, but, and there's also what I found, in my experience, is a wariness of leadership, which I find very comforting. Of somebody not wanting to speak over people and not wanting to take charge, it's much more what does everyone else think? It's much more collaborative and safer.

Yeah, very important to me.

And a similar question about what we've talked previously about the movement being kind of sidelined or ignored. And why is it that you think - if you think at all- why the Suffragette or Suffrage movement has

been canonized in history as something which women have achieved, and Greenham has sort of been sidelined?

Hmm, interesting. Well, the whole concept of democracy and this, I'm just thinking it in my head now. And voting is a male construction. And so, sort of the Suffragette movement, which was for women to have the vote, which was their way of doing things um, would be part of history, I guess. Whereas the peace camp at Greenham was not part of that process. It was - it was a protest, but it was so much more than that. It was something that shook the foundations of the whole patriarchy, in that women were doing it their own way and separately, and not originally - it wasn't separate. It was a women's march, because women wanted to march together. But men came with them, and supported them. And it wasn't until the evictions got - the first eviction at the camp - I wasn't there - but I know that women decided then that they didn't want men living there anymore. Because they were, that would be provocative or something towards the other, towards the enemy - the powers that be. And men would be provoked by other men and men. And therefore not having men around was a much better idea. And the camp evolved because of that. And I - not all men are going to be provoked by other men, but an awful lot of them can't help it still, and um - I've forgotten what the question was.

Compared to the Suffragette movement - why...

Oh, yes, yes. Um, because men are left out of it.

Yes.

Completely. I think that's probably what it is.

Yeah, I liked what you said as-well about voting in the male construction - women are joining male society, whereas in Greenham it's, this is something completely separate. And we're trying to build something different to what you've presented to us.

Yes. Yes. Yes, it's a different thing. What's her name - who was it. Who said - haha, I'll have to consult my diary, I'm not very good at remembering anything. Well Ghandi said 'There are no roads leading to peace, peace is the road'. That's not what I was looking for. See if I can find it. (Flips through pages). No. It's about, we're not going to use your methods to get, to gain our, not to gain our ends, but I suppose it is, but we're not going to use male methods um, for - and we need to find our methods. So doing it our own way. Somebody said it.

Oh was it Audre Lorde?

I think it might be.

She said 'You can't deconstruct the Master's house using the Master's tools. You have to do something completely different.'

Oh, yes. Yes, something like that. It was in, was it Nottingham? Nottingham contemporary art gallery - the new place just opened it's on the wall. Near - something about Greenham that I've never seen before. Yeah, but I didn't know it was Audre Lorde, it might be here.

Yeah, 'cause I think that's - just the again thinking out loud more than anything else, is that we could see Greenham as kind of an experiment in women's society and kind of what a matriarchy could look like. And so even by saying, how do we can canonize it in history. It's actually not part of that history that we've already got. It's a completely different thing. Yeah.

Yes. I'm not quite sure what you mean by canonize.

So kind of what is accepted - as kind of the story of Britain or the story, the historical story, so thinking about the miner's strike.

Yeah.

I feel that is kind of part of the British story. Like the narrative of what Britain is, and I was saying to somebody else. It's weird because the miner's strike is one of the things that was incredibly divisive at the time, but now it's just accepted it happened. This was the strike, that was it, done. In a kind of cut and dry, very basic way. Of course, the reality is not like - there were other things happening, taxes, not taxes - pensions for the wives and things like that - it's still an active thing. But the animosity around it still exists. And I find - and understandably - but from the victors, say like David Cameron made a comment about Arthur Scargill very recently. Like he should apologise for how he led the union. It's kind of like it's happened, move on. Like the context of Britain is now so different, but you're still holding on to this animosity, and I find that when you talk about Greenham to people as well - there's still an animosity from the people who would have opposed it at the time, and it's kind of like society has moved on. Why haven't you moved on from this? What is it about it that's still antagonizing you? And it must be that it's, an attack on their way of life, or they feel it's an attack on our life. And yeah, I find that quite interesting - how it was in the early '80s. And what are we nearly 40 years later, and people still have that reaction to it. I don't know. That's something I've been thinking about as I've been doing these interviews. There is still that hangover from it. And that really interests me as to why?

Hhm - I don't, well, because it's so outside of mainstream. I'm... yes.

Or they can't pigeonhole it.

No, no.

They can't give a reason - or it doesn't fit. If that make sense? It doesn't fit in what the world looks like. And things aren't, I don't know. And I think also maybe it's to do with because it was nuclear, like the roots of it were kind of talking about nuclear warfare, and that is still an ongoing issue.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah, I have found it really interesting.

I mean, there are a lot of issues in the world that never get sorted and solved. And the the issue of male power... (laughs).

Oh no, it's fine now! (Laughs).

Yes! (Laughs)...hasn't quite been sorted yet.

No!

But patriarchy, you know, I mean, I was, I was a firm believer in that it is, I am a firm believer in that, the democracy and the power over, is still needing to be undone. And we're kind of - we're on the edge, we're on the edge. It's coming. You know, it feels like this is the time for peaceful non-violent revolution, because it's got to happen, because things just aren't working, we're all going to die again. And I really, I got involved because I was convinced that we were all going to die in a nuclear holocaust. And I didn't have children because I did not want them to grow into, into, into the world as it as it was when I was of childbearing age and I really am glad now, in some ways that I didn't. In other ways I regret it because I don't have grandchildren and that would have been really nice. But you know, I can share my sister's. But yeah, I mean, this is a hellhole in many ways, where we live, and the way we live, and I'm sorry, but you've got it! (Laughs).

That was actually going to be my next question - about motherhood - if the decision... Yeah, it was exactly what you said, if that had been a thought process for you, about nuclear, and if it had affected any other choices that you've made about motherhood. Because I feel in my generation at the moment, a lot of discussions about climate change.

Yeah.

And a hesitancy about if me and my, my peer group are able to have children, but not only are we able, but would we want to bring children into a world that is going to end in what - 100 years if things don't change? And that's the world that eight inherit and how ethical actually, is it to do that?

Exactly.

I wonder if those conversations were happening at the same time?

I'm sorry. It's terrible. It is terrible. (Takes some deep breaths). It's not a world - it's a, it's a, it's not a world going the way I'd like it to be going, but out there in nature, it's the most beautiful world I could ever imagine. So there's always a contradiction and, a, but there is always a contradiction. And I feel like I'm still fearful inside of what could happen, and probably what will happen, but, I don't want to think that way too much.

Yeah.

And I wish I could have the strength of mind and self belief that say someone like Sarah had, having that baby in the bender at Greenham, and discovering that, yeah, we were enough just women there - together to make it possible for her to be safe, and all the rest of it. But I couldn't do that. And I'd say I haven't been empowered sufficiently to believe that I can change things by myself, because I'm not by myself, fortunately. But things like this women's peace... I've seen it. So I'll talked about this. When I was at Greenham, I was very aware of the sea, and very aware of the Pacific women - Pacific struggles against the nuclear threat, and it was an Australian woman and I who got this together. Her name's Bryony. Oh, she was staying at the Ranyatella (N.B.spelt phonetically) at the time, I didn't know that. Or I'd forgotten, rather, and we wanted to have a women's peace boat. It was sort of combining our love of nature and our love of the sea, to create this. We wanted to create a women's peace boat - I knew about Greenpeace boat, and I thought we should have a women's peace boat so that we

could - what does it say? 'An international group of women wanting to buy or build an ocean going boat to reclaim the sea from the nuclear mentality that polluted it, and threatens all our planet.' And we wanted to find out how much interest, support there was, but it didn't really get very far, sadly, because I'm not a very good organiser. But of course, there was a women's peace boat that went through Greenpeace to Palestine.

Yeah.

And um, but it was all - it came out of Greenpeace, which is mixed organisation, which is great. I'm glad it happened. Um, um. Yeah. It would have been great if we've been able to do that at the time it was looking forward to reclaiming the sea.

Yeah, I read it earlier - it sounded amazing.

It was - it was great idea. I mean lots of ideas came out that didn't actually get put to practice.

And you talked previously about Jay Greenham.

Yeah.

Born there, obviously, I'm - this is Sarah's story, so feel free to say as much or as little as you want. Did you see any particular challenges about having children in general at the camp? Or did they just think of it as an adventure playground?!

(Laughs). Oh, hhm, well, I felt that there were enough women around all the time to take care of the children. And like there's me with Elizabeth there, who lived at Green Gate for a while, but yes, there were problems. It meant that whoever was - unless, unless equal shares and responsibilities were shared equally, so that it wasn't always the mother who had to care for the child, because otherwise the child wasn't free to roam. And it did limit whatever the carers were prepared to engage in -

were able to engage in. But I didn't feel that it interfered with the day to day work that we were engaged in living together. Actually. There weren't many children at the camp. Plenty of visitors brought children. I didn't see any reason for women to be fearful. Apart from obviously the camps close to the roads were horrible for children to be. They weren't free to move, which is so important for a child. And there were plenty of - oh what on earth did we call them? The vigilante... is there a word like that?

Vigilantes.

Vigilantes. That's the word. They were vigilantes, local, well they weren't always local, but they were scary. And I wouldn't want a child to be exposed to them. That was a reason for not being there with a child. Um. Hmm.

And you talked briefly earlier about spirituality.

Yeah.

Did that - your interest in spirituality, and your practice develop while you were at Greenham, and the people you met, or was it something that you had brought to the camp?

Um, well, I did engage in it- engage in it (laughs)! Before I went to Greenham, but it definitely developed hugely while I was there. And, I mean, because I was at Green Gate and I was in nature all the time. Um, not all the time because we had, we had to do all sorts of things, but it was a good place for um, building a connection with nature, which has been - continued to be really, really important to me. I'm living here in a city and I shouldn't be - I don't want to be, but I have got, I should let you sit here for a moment - I've got this wonderful view of the allotments, it goes down the valley and up the other side. And, um, and the front window upstairs has a view over Derbyshire. But, um, and that was really important to me when I got this house, because I was living in Haversitch (N.B. spelt phonetically) , well I was living in Bamford with

Lisa before that, before I came - here we decided we couldn't live together. But we continue to have a relationship not living together - sad. And I, yeah, my basics of Wicken self continues, and it looks like - well Lisa and I have just initiated two women into a group of four now, observing the festivals, which is lovely.

Yeah.

I used to be in a group here in Sheffield. We weren't, there were never quite 13 of us in the coven. But it's, it's, it was, it was an important basis of life for me at the camp. Doing little rituals. It's a lot safer here, somehow. We left a moon circle at Yellow Gate, even after the camp was destroyed, and when, when the new one - when they developed the new camp there it was still there. That was really good. I, and there was lots of things, lots of er - thinking about the goddess puppet that Katrina made, being part of that was really special, and we carried her to a couple of things, but she wasn't always there. And some women weren't in the slightest bit interested, I think. But it was always, it was always important to me to be aware of a spiritual element in everything that we were doing.

And how would you say that being a committed activist and campaigner affected your personal life? And how did the two intertwine - if you can separate them?

I don't, I don't actually think they are separable, but I do think that um, I've - I am not an active campaigner now. And have, I was exhausted at the end of just a year, and I was young then.

How old were you when you would have been going?

Well, in '83, I was 31. I think.

So late 20s when you started going?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I think I was 31 - '83....5... Yeah. 31 or 32. Sorry, what was the question?

How do the two intertwine - if they do intertwine, no sorry - How do they intertwine if they can be separated?

Yeah.

About activism.

Activism and and the rest of your life?

Yeah.

Um, it's, it's, I should I should think it's pretty hard to have a rest of the life as a full time worker and being much of an activist, like you can only be a weekend activist can't you, if you've got a full time job. And for me it was really special. I was there full time - sometimes - not all the time, but I was engaged as an activist. That was the focus of my life for a few years. And doing it that way was fantastic. Doing it part time is difficult, I think. Here in Sheffield there is a group that I thought I was going to get involved in and never have managed to - I've been to one meeting. So I'm not, I'm not really an activist now. I mean, I'm an armchair activist. But I think it will change in the coming months.

Yeah.

It didn't, once I wasn't living there - since I've not been living there, which is a very long time ago, it hasn't been the priority. And while I went down, I went with Tania down to Greenham on the 30th anniversary of it's starting - when would that have been? 30 years from at '81?

2014.

Yeah, we went down there.

Oh, 2012. 11? 12/11? (Laughs).

Whenever it was - it was it was not that long ago and we went down, and everything had changed so much, and we - and it was a priority for me to go. But it was so sad going and so strange, because there was, there was - there is a sort of memorial there. Have you been?

I haven't - no.

Oh!

But I know - is there an arts centre there now, on the base or something?

There is something like that. Yes. And that's where we met. We did go Yeah, there was something happening. But it was so dry.

Yeah.

It was nothing. There was some lovely feeling between us there, but it was a very dry building - you know! There was no rain bouncing on our heads! (Laughs). It's difficult to imagine how some something could exist inside the patriarchal buildings that we have now around us everywhere, and yeah, it's the spirituality the being out in all the places in the Peak District near where I lived - when I was out there - made me feel very strong, and it's, it doesn't really live in houses very easily.

Yeah.

Mm hmm.

And this is more a broad question. Why do you think it's important for Greenham to be remembered by subsequent generations?

What did you say it was a what?

Why do you think it's important for it to be remembered?

Yeah, because it was so powerful, and so special, and unusual. Very important. And an example that can inspire.

Yeah.

I'm shocked that young women don't know about it, and an older women don't know about it. And people in general don't know about it. It's very important to know about it. Yeah, because it it did happen and it, it was very um, well, I can't think what the word is - it did succeed in that cruise missiles went, I mean, maybe they would have gone anyway, who knows, but they went, and so the object of being there was achieved, but it was more than that as well. The example of women living together should not be forgotten in that way.

That's the end of my questions.

Aww!

Unless you have stuff that you want to talk about, because I know you were writing stuff down as we were talking.

Oh, yes, I was. Um, no, I think I wrote about - I think I did talk about, you mentioned friendships . And um, maybe that's why I'm sort of a bit alienated from it now, in that I don't have - I've got Lisa and she was important to me. When we were developing our relationship, it was important to me that she'd been to Greenham, and was actively engaged in Wicken, spirituality. Those two went together, and have kept, have kept that part of me alive. And going down to um, party, somebody's 60th birthday party - doesn't matter Tania's 60th birthday party, and that there were there was a Greenham element in that...

Oh, wow!

...event, which was really lovely.

Yeah.

And I would always want that to be part of my life. And I'm not wanting to be sentimental about it, but is, it because it's an active thing.

Yeah.

Yeah. I, I really value it as an active - not, not - it inspires the active part of me more than anything else, I guess. Yeah.

Also like so foundational, it must be so foundational to who you view yourself as, like an identity. And it's been fascinating while I've been interviewing women that they have met their partners, not necessarily at Greenham, but they are with women or other people who were involved in other ways with Greenham, and it's just so nice. Yeah, these connections kind of stretch. And it doesn't necessarily mean that people met there, but that is something they have in common. I think it's really nice.

Yes - 'common'.

Yeah! (Laughs).

(Laughs). Yeah. Have you heard about the song? You know, The Diggers, who were active during the - oh, the Digger's song. Oh my goodness. You've seen this before?

I've seen a version of it, because we have a musician in our group who's doing research and I think she has the books, and she was doing songs from there.

Ah right, well, somewhere rather is the Digger song. And we changed the words, The Diggers were a group of people during the English revolution in the 17th century. And they were mixed. They weren't all

women at all. But there's a beautiful soul. And there's a version of it been made. And have you seen Carry Greenham Home?

Yes, yes.

Well, at one point, there's a part where Babs is sitting beside the road watching the cars go by - after the one of the evictions, and she's singing the Greenham version of the Digger's song, but it's a fantastic song. And it's a piece of history that sounds like you didn't know - the Digger's song, who The Digger's were?

No.

Oh god (looks through papers), why can't I find it? And we've now got a song of the history of Greenham, and that's that's the issue. That's another reason why it's not remembered. Or people don't - that, that it was it was it was oral, it was an oral thing. You know, we, we spoke to each other and we sang, and all these songs evoke it so strongly, and I can't bloody find it! Dinger's song - Digger's song.

Oh, were the Digger's from the West Midlands? And it was...

They were the smashers of the - in the West Midlands.

Was it the West Midlands? Maybe I'm thinking of something else. Was it to do with the blacksmiths, and it was them revolting the English revolution and they did a song - I can't remember.

No - I (starts singing) 'In 1649 to St. George's hills. The ragged band they called the diggers came to show the people's will.' (Laughs) 'And divided we will make whole' (hums). I can't find it. I mean, everyone should know the Greenham songs. Can't find it. Ah, maybe it's in the front. Um...

Oh there!

Digger's song - oh we're supposed to be finished by now. Have you got someone else to go and see?

No. Two, tomorrow. One in Hebron Bridge, one in Accrington.

Oh! I wonder if I knew any of these people, so this is the Digger's song that we - I remember, and it makes me cry, partly because St George's hill was really near where I lived in Surrey when I was born. But this was the - actually, I don't know the words, but Babs is singing on Carry Greenham Home, I mean I know the tune, but I don't know what the words are, but I expect it's very worth having. But then there's another song (starts singing) 'All around the nine mile fence. (hums) Carry Greenham home. Carry Greenham home'. I'm the one in the film that's crying.

Are you?

(Laughs). And it's about having a child or not. Partly. I don't even know what it says - I'll look at it with you.

And did you go into Newbury much?

No, not all that much. No.

It's just so much that came out of it that's so - like what you were saying earlier about it being so creative, and fun, and full of joy. But also like it is such a radical thing that happened. And also so principled as well like when we protest against murders and things like that. It is so, when you drill it down to what it started as, and what it was about - it is about men killing everybody else. And it's so frightening.

Basic.

Yeah, it is.

Fundamental.

Yeah, it is. And then it's odd - not odd, you can understand why people in positions of power, kind of, especially through the media were so blanket 'No, don't support this', you can see why - but when you drill down to it, it's not difficult to understand what everybody was doing and why. I was saying to somebody earlier on a different interview, that the nuclear threat has not been present in my life at all. And it was only very recently, and it's something I've struggled, not to empathise with, but to understand - like, how anxious it would have made people, how it would have frightened people. And it was only very recently when the North Korea were launching test missiles I was like, this would have been every day, like, all the time, no end in sight sort of thing. And it is terrifying. And I don't know how...

It is.

...and like, even now I'm kind of like a bit anxious talking about it. Because when - I was getting BBC breaking news alerts on my phone, and it was like 11 o'clock at night, and I was like, I can't get to sleep, like, what if something happens? And it's only then I really started to understand how terrifying it must have been. And kind of all these public service announcements that are on the TV and what to do in a nuclear war and those sorts of things. It must have been horrendous.

It was, it was and, and, you know, the 1945 with Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not that long before. Well, it was only just before I was born - in the very early '50s, and so, yeah, it could happen. And the Cold War was a really scary thing. But bloody Trump is, is, is terrifying to me.

Yeah.

That he is around, whether he will stay around for very much longer, we don't know. But he is around and there are people that still support him.

Yeah, me and my partner always laugh, and it's not funny, but to us it was quite funny at the time - on when Jeremy Corbyn was being

interviewed on, I think it was the election Question Time, and there was some middle aged man going 'What are you gonna do about the nukes, Jeremy?' It's like what era are you from, if that's your concern. That's what I mean, about people not being able to let go of it. It's like, of course we shouldn't have nuclear weapons, of-course we shouldn't, there are other things that are more pressing to everyday people. And 'What are you going to do about the nukes? Tell me you're going to hit the nuclear button, du duh duh duh', and it's like...

'Tell me you're going to?'

Yeah! 'If they attack what are you going do to?' And it was like, why are you set on destruction? Why? Why? Like, I just, it's, it's a mindset that's so alienating, and he kept going this man, I was just like, oh my god. I'd really funny.

Yeah. You know, there are people like that. And men are very polarized. You know, they, I think that, that, that the generations are more polarized now than they were during my youth - like you. I mean when I was very young in the '60s, with the hippies, and everything there was a gentrification of the world. And fighting the Vietnam War was fighting with ammo but in a gentle way, sticking flowers into guns. You know that sort of thing. But the separation of the genders in the last 20 years, you know the pink and the blue - in the Early Learning Centres -they were very big when you were little. And um, I couldn't believe it was happening because it stopped. It had stopped but now we've got both boys and girls terrified about the way they look.

Yeah, yes.

And they've got to be right, in the right colours and blah blah, oh god, it's so petty and yet so huge to people.

Yeah. That's what I find quite scary about Trump, is because to me what he's talking about is petty, and actions are petty on a world stage. And I just think...

How did this happen?

Yeah, yeah.

Polarization.

And with Brexit and things like that, again, it's so petty, and like, I find the whole thing about sovereignty, and these abstract ideas, which means nothing like.

Yes, they do mean nothing.

That people are fighting over, and it's like, the world is going to overheat and end, and why are we talking about this abstract thing, which essentially, like, is unsolvable when you're dealing with a really pressing issue? So I don't know!

I know, it's - you could look at it and say people are just ignorant. But isn't, isn't quite as simple as that, but it is as well. And when I used to do anti racism workshops and things, I became aware that it's, it's, it's a relatively simple thing to show people that what they're thinking about is not a reality. If they're thinking, you know, well, they're people 'Black people are much lesser than us and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah'. But, you know, what makes you think that? And asking sensible questions. Why do you think that? For instance, is a good way to make somebody realise that they don't really know what they're talking about? But people aren't doing that often enough.

Yeah.

And people are getting away with with being stupid, being stupid, unfortunately. And school isn't teaching kids to think and question any more than it used to, sadly, generally. But we've got - and let you go into...

I was so interested in what you were saying about Wages...

Wages for Housework?

Because I think it's really difficult to articulate sometimes, when you're confronted by a movement or an idea. And you feel like there's something wrong, there's something...

Not right.

... not right and I can't articulate what it is. That happens to me quite a lot. And I can't remember what it was recently and I was really like, I can't even tell you why I feel uncomfortable with it. But I just like know it's not for me, and I can't get to why, and it - without kind of unpicking a lot of other things that I am not afraid to interrogate, but I could interrogate, but it would be a lot of power, like, concentration to go into all these different rabbit holes. Like why I think a certain way about something. And, and it's never something that's like, you know, deep down I'm horrible. It's more just like well actually why do I think that? And then why do I think that? And actually maybe this has a knock on effect on that? I'm not afraid of it but um, it's just a lot of work.

It is a lot of work, yeah.

But that's why I was interested in it because it's sometimes it's so instant that you're like, No, that isn't...

Well it wasn't the idea of Wages for Housework. It was the, you know, because that's reasonable - notionally - it was the way that the women were presenting themselves. They weren't trying to communicate and listen, they didn't want to listen to any opposition. They just wanted to dismiss it.

Yeah.

And that's, that's partly what the problems are that, um, people don't want to communicate really. They just want to force themselves upon you - one.