

Sheila Thornton, Barbara Blower and Mockie Harrison

Right. I think one of the first questions really was, how did you become part of the peace movement in general? Did you all join together? Or...

Um, don't you think all of us - sorry, two of us were really influenced by our mothers? Because I know my mother was very, um, well she was very keen on the peace movement had been from the '60s. And your mum's quite..

Yeah.

Militant in her views of things. I think it starts, I think, in childhood, and there's almost like a principal thing going on. But I don't know. I don't know if you guys but for me, it was the parental influence. It was parental influence, but it was, you know, just the mounting thing of the Cold War starting all over again, particularly with Reagan and Thatcher, and then it just felt like right, we've really got to get out and do something.

So that's when you go became interested in Greenham common, was it?

I think for me, and us, I moved to High Wycombe near Barbara, and Mockie. And there was two bases just outside in High Wycombe one with US Air Force Daws Hill, and the other an RAF strike command. And anyway, Barbara and I started up a support group for Action Aid, the charity Action Aid. And one of the people that came along - a couple, young couple, they said, 'There's something called - why don't you come along to Wycombe Peace Council?' I said 'I don't know what that is?' And they said, 'Oh, well, you know, about, you know, we've got all these bombs coming and cruise missiles and stuff', and we went, I went anywhere to a meeting, and started to find out, and met people at Wickham Peace Council. Then they said there was going to be a demonstration on Frogmore which is a sort of square in High Wycombe.

And they were going to that because the cruise missiles were coming to Greenham common. And that's when we kind of started to become more active. I mean, we did, we did things at Daws Hill, and there was a presence outside Strike Command most weekends, there was a caravan there - do remember?

Yeah.

And we took turns in going to Strike Command. So we began to be active, if you like, in that way. And the first time I remember going to Greenham was when they had Surround the Base.

Yes. So that was quite early on?

Yeah.

And the Peace Council, some women in the Peace Council said we'll get a coach up. And we went on a coach, didn't we?

Yeah, in fact, there's lots of pictures I think, of the coach going there and all of us. So that would have been '83, I think wouldn't it?

'82 / '83. I can't remember.

So it wouldn't have been women only then would it?

Yes.

It was then already, was it?

Oh, gosh, yes. I mean...

I think Surround the Base was only women, wasn't it?

You could only camp if you're a woman, you could come and you could be part of the action, and you could support if you're a man, but you couldn't stay there.

So women only was quite early on?

Oh, right from the beginning.

Yeah, I didn't do Surround the Base because I'd just had Oliver.

Yeah. So how many years ago? Yeah, that's right. So Barbara's children were very young, and my son wasn't very old.

So why do you think it was women only - was it a conscious decision or did it sort of evolve from something that happened?

We were very active at the time, Mockie and I particularly, in establishing a refuge - we'd established a refuge in High Wycombe and that sort of - from consciousness raising groups.

We'd been in consciousness raising groups, women's political groups, I've been in the national abortion campaign, right from sort of 1976. And I think it just felt like a natural thing. I think also, because there are a lot of peace camps all around the country and being member of CND I had all this stuff through, and had been to other places. And there was, sometimes men could get a bit too wound up particularly by the MOD. Because they did take great delight in kind of poking fun at you all the rest of it, so and men seemed to react too much and I never felt comfortable with that and I've always felt fine at Greenham.

So you didn't get the aggressive content?

No, never.

But wasn't it a group of women that match from Wales, to start up?

Yes it was.

Yeah. Women just took control of it.

Yeah.

This is the way we want to we want to do it.

Yeah, you're right, I'd forgotten.

And they went to the main gate, which was Orange.

Yellow.

Yellow gate. That's right. They went to Yellow Gate didn't they. So we went down to do this around the base and then I think we must have just kept in touch with what was going on.

And well, I'm a member of the peace group Wickham peace group.

Yeah.

And then we decided we were going to start Chiltern Women for Peace, didn't we?

Yeah.

Because maybe because typically you and I have always operated with a, within a sort of woman, only political...

So you'd come from the women only protests anyway?

Yeah.

Because of Women's Aid.

Yes.

They were the only organisation doing anything.

Yeah. And I think it just, it just felt natural to have our own space, and not get too bogged down with some of the things that sometimes when you - Wycombe peace group, sometimes you think do yourselves a favour!

So there was a freedom about being at Greenham?

Yeah.

Oh yeah.

It felt really, very supportive. A lot of fun. I mean, it was pretty basic, but you know, you expected that - digging your own shit pits and stuff, you know?

Yes, yes. I read about it. Certainly I was reading a lot about that.

So we'd tend to if we went to camp we would sometimes, I mean, we lived in Wickham - that was near enough to go and come back in a day.

Yeah.

So we could go for - I remember there was a dragon day, I've got pictures of you sewing a dragon, remember that? So we could go for a one off day, if you like. But we could also go and take the kids and stuff for longer. So we did - they had a 10 days at Greenham, and we took part in that. But when we went for longer we, I don't know how it came about, we chose Red Gate as being the gate that our - no I mean, we didn't you know, stop anybody else being there. But that was the gate that we kind of...

Because there wasn't always, there wasn't always anyone there was there?

No, that's right.

They said go to one of the gates where there isn't...

So define the the different coloured gates were they...

Well there was just the right number of gates for the colours of the rainbow.

Yeah.

So creative women said right well we'll call them the colours of the rainbow.

Yes, but what I mean was there any special feeling about each gate?

Oh sorry. Well, I remember liking Red Gate because it was was a bit off the beaten track. You know where you could camp, is it were, so the children was safe.

Yeah.

It didn't attract the attention in quite the way that - Orange gate was quite near the main road, wasn't it? Whereas this one was off, so it was easy to dig your shit pits, there's plenty of room to have as many tents as you wanted, and the campfire, and all the rest of it, and you just you know, and because it was a bit remote, putting our banners up - although we lost a banner off - somebody pinched our first banner. But you could put a banner up and therefore you could make your presence known to people driving past, so they they realised that this, you know, it was more than just Yellow Gate.

Well I think they were I mean, there was a reasonable presence at Yellow and Blue in particular, my memory tells me. And there was a reasonable presence during the 10 day campaign at most of the gates. But for some reason we don't always seem to gravitate towards Red because there was, as Sheila said, there was space for the kids to run around at the back, and room for all the tents and everything.

So how do you think most women got on with all the military men around and the police?

I think it varied. One of the things we used to do was we would go and do a night watch, because all the gates were the women were sleeping, you need to have someone up and awake around the campfire. Otherwise, people tend to just throw things at the tents or benders. So I can - I went to university, and I can remember doing a night watch and going right up to the fence because it was lit, to read, to do - to work basically, and a little voice coming out - 'Are you alright ma'am?' And it was some, you know, 12 year old little American soldier at the back. And I used to chat to them quite a lot, individually. They were always very bemused, but not unfriendly. But then I think it was different when it was a large number of us - then it used to change.

Yeah, I think there was also a difference between the American troops and the MOD. The MOD seemed to be a bit more bolshy. But certainly, I think some of the women who actually lived at Greenham, I know one in particular who had a long term relationship with one of the MOD police, so you know, I think it wasn't, it was okay by and large, I think it was one there were big demonstrations. And you've got a lot of police brought in for demonstrations, in particular on the horses. And that was frightening for the horses. Um, people driving past tooting and all the rest of it, it could get a bit crazy, but most of the time, I think it was fine.

They used to get bit freaked out when we did things like sing.

Oh yeah!

I can remember being at the fence singing...

An aggressive act!

Singing, and especially if you were doing a repetitive - Can't Kill the Spirit, for example, that really seemed to freak them, because they just didn't know how to respond because we weren't damaging anything. We weren't being aggressive. But they obviously didn't like us doing it. But they couldn't really respond because we weren't doing anything we weren't supposed to be doing.

So music was quite a big part of the camp?

Oh yes, songbook.

You've got the songbook.

And it's, it's funny like the chief the police to the tune of the Grand Old Duke of York. But I think there was a lot of talk at one stage, towards the beginning, my memory tells me, but as we all know, it's particularly faulty. That in some ways we were doing our own military, as it were, campaign, but in our way, and there was a lot of talk about how armies and things use bands, or the Scots use the bagpipes and things like that to intimidate. But there was talk about how songs could unite us and make us feel.

Yeah, so you felt it was uniting?

But also I think it didn't have a weird effect on the troops.

Oh it did. I've got a Peggy Seeger CD, and I put it on the other day, and all of a sudden she started singing some Greenham songs, and it absolutely stopped me in my tracks, because it takes you straight back. It was just wonderful.

And we used them all over the place I remember yes going and standing on an island somewhere near Marble Arch - I can't remember what we were doing - do you remember?

Yes, yes!

We were in the middle of all this traffic, and we were singing the one about - oh, I can't remember it now something about 'No nuclear'...

Oh, 'I like the daffodils?'

Yeah. And we just sang it over and over again, because the traffic was so dense and slow moving, people wound their windows down, and obviously we've got banners and things. And they could, and I think that, that it was getting into their consciousness as well. We did it there, we went to Daws Hill - this US Air Force Base one day, I remember we did an action where we went on Saturday morning, and we were all dressed in Marks and Spencers suits, and pushing the buggies, do you remember, because we've got a lot of young children. And I don't know how - I was saying to someone the other day, I don't know how we did it. We walked on to that - whether they just had barriers and they didn't know what we were doing, because there was often a presence out there with a with a fire and that, wasn't there. But that we just walked on, and I remember them going 'Oh, there's women on the base. There's women, there's women, and they've got children and they're on the, on the base.' And we surrounded a sentry box or something. A flagpole in the middle. And we started to sing and I remember them going 'Yes, they're all around the flagpole, around the flagpole, you need to come you need to come, they're singing and yes, they are singing', and this person got so kind of irate that we - and that's all we did, we stood there for an hour and we sang, and then we walked off - and they didn't know what to make of it. But it was, it did empower you. And I think it did get the message over in a way, and it made you make, I mean, I can remember camping at Red Gate, and the people, you know, charging up and down the road you know, yelling 'Go back to Russia, you lesbians' because they was - the anger in men, young men, in particular, they

hurled these terrible insults at us - like we were Russian and that we were all lesbians - they thought they were insults. It was ridiculous. And they they couldn't handle the fact that we sang. We camped. We had a lot of fun. We laughed a lot. We laughed all the time.

What did the local residents - how did they react to you?

I can't honestly say that I know.

Some were very supportive, and some were very anti. By - purely by coincidence, I ended up living in Newbury for two and a half years. And so I asked - I got to know one woman in particular very well, and I asked her what she think - she said they just didn't know what to make of you. Just didn't know what to make of you. But she, I mean, she's a smallholder, and she thought it was a good idea, because she didn't want the missiles in her town.

Well no.

And I used to walk my dog on Greenham common afterwards.

Yeah.

First time I did it, I was terrified because I thought I was going to get arrested!

And you talked about camping overnight, that that was really important as well, because the women would sometimes go off on cruise watch - following the cruise missile maneuvers. And so they wanted somebody there, in case the bailiffs came, because particularly at the beginning there was a lot of violence against the women when they bailiffs came. And they honestly thought, I think I think they thought that if they were rough, and they cleared that, everybody would pack up and go home, they had no idea of the depth of feeling that there was amongst the women. And I take my hat off to them. I didn't camp like that - you

know, week after week, month after month, and what they had to put up with was pretty awful at the time.

Yeah.

Did you think there was any particular people in charge of what was going on, or any decisions...

No, no, no one person in charge, that's why they had all the arguments. Constant arguments about the way to do things and, you know, I think I couldn't have hacked being there that long, to be honest, because I'm not the sort of person that can constantly you know, I have to have a bit of structure in the way decisions are making, and there was falling out, and coming together and all the rest of it, but no, there were some people who obviously spoke better than others, and therefore got into - 'cause who did we had come to Wycombe Peace Council? Because was it Rebecca Johnson?

I can't remember.

We had, we had speakers that we arranged - women to come and speak in Wycombe, and held public meetings that we organised. I mean, we had Oliver Postgate come one time, you know, we were quite instrumental by then, in trying to - um, Wycombe Peace Council doing other stuff than what it done before.

Do you think this collective decision making worked in the end?

It did for...

I mean it lasted long enough, something worked.

If you think about it, I mean we didn't have any structure with Women's Aid, so we'd come from a background of getting things done without any structure. So it felt absolutely natural.

We'd do things like if, when we got to Red Gate, somebody would wander round to Yellow Gate and say, you know, we're here, what's going on, you know? Is there anything planned? Just checking it out - kind of courtesy in a way, because that was the woman's home, so we were just coming...

So there was no special reason anybody was at a particular gate?

No, no.

There was one gate there was a sanctuary, which gate was that?

Oh, yeah, that's right - where you went if you wanted a bit of time out. That should have been Green Gate, but I might be making that up.

Is that Blue Gate?

I can't remember.

I think you're right actually.

That was quite important, they were quite important about what went on in the sanctuary area. So you had to respect that..

So it was for contemplating, rest, rather than....

Yeah, I'm not quite sure.

I think it was part protection as well, because some women actually ran away either from abusive relationships or whatever.

On the run!

Do you think there was quite a lot of people escaping that sexual abuse elsewhere, or do you think it was just a few of them?

I don't think, well it certainly wasn't part of any conversation I had with anybody in particular.

Others used to come and join us at Red Gate, on quite a regular basis, there was somewhere from the Midlands - was it Redditch, springs to mind.

Yeah, they did think.

I don't know why I think that.

So you got to know other women.

Because yeah, 'cause there was a constant sense of discussion and debate, and something, I mean, we did have fun - like we've just said, and it was - but you did you talk about stuff, didn't you? And you know, be challenged in your thinking.

I think one of the big challenges actually links back to what you were saying was the, the sex workers, particularly on Yellow Gate could be very challenging about it, because let's face it, we're pretty middle class, we were - our group was. And we could get challenged on our attitudes. So, I mean, that was, that was a good thing it was like, 'Okay, sorry, I didn't mean to make any assumption.' So in some ways, they certainly were going there for, for more reasons than just the fact that they were anti nuclear.

Right. So when you say there were sex workers, what was...

There was a sex workers collective that were camping at Yellow Gate.

Were they've where they active when they were there, or were they escaping something? Or were they just...

When you say when were they active, do you mean politically?

No. I meant sexually active.

Oh, sexually.

When you say they were sex workers.

I actually don't know.

They just congregated together? They were known sex workers?

Yes, they advertised themselves as such.

Oh right.

They actually had a banner. (Laughs). Don't think they were touting for business.

They were protesting in general rather than...

No, they I think they genuinely came because they really believed that there shouldn't be nuclear weapons. They were definite. They were very clear about that. But they came with some other issues about their lives, and how men dealt with them. Um, and to be honest, I mean, I think it formed a lot of our conversations about how we operated as women.

Absolutely. I think, you know, I wasn't you know, it made me think about sexuality, and body image, and all those kind of things that I hadn't really had time, or need, or want or anything to think about. So it was very good in terms of challenging me - being my stereotypes.

I just remembered they had the Kings Cross collective.

Right?

Yeah.

Yeah, that's right.

Yeah, I know, 'cause I can remember when I first told my husband I want to do the 10 days. He was like (makes grumpy noise) '...look after the kids'. I didn't stay with him, actually. But I remember saying to him, and if there was a war, like the last two world wars, you'd just march off and expect me to do everything. So this is just the equivalent alright. He was like (makes grumble noise). He accepted that.

How did the children who were there long term - were they educated?
Did somebody...

I don't know.

There weren't many kids there. Very tiny number.

Somebody had a baby there, didn't they?

Yeah.

But I think most parents had a support structure. So they wouldn't...

They didn't necessarily bring the children all the time?

Not for a long time, you know, not for months and months on end. I mean, we, as Children for Peace we got into the supporting role in the van. And I don't remember seeing children when I went around in - that was nights.

We delivered the food.

I don't remember seeing loads of kids there.

We had this wonderful woman called Phyllida who was as rich as Croesus. And she bought this van and converted it into a kitchen...

She lived at Ascot, didn't she?

Jordans.

Jordans.

She was brilliant. She turned up to the miners march with her chauffeur and a Bentley. And I turned up with my 2CV, put my miners in the back and the other ones who got back in the Bentley were going - look at you look who you've got! It was like...okay! But she bought this van so we could, loads of people sort of cooked on rota, and we'd go down there and just take down hot food. Particularly when it was difficult to keep fires going in the bad weather, through the winter and, and it was just too much in some ways for them to have to constantly be thinking about where to get food from, how do we heat it, all the rest of it.

And we had blankets and bedding, didn't we?

Yeah.

Sanitary towels and soap - that kind of thing.

So were a quite a few people doing this?

Well yeah, because Children for Peace covered various groups. And somebody just - I don't know who - coordinated it, so you knew what which weeks it was coming to Wycombe and then you sorted out who was cooking on which night, and the van would parked in our road for a bit, and people would - if I wasn't travelling, somebody would come to my house, pick the van up and go - whatever. And it all worked incredibly well my god...

Chiltern Women for Peace.

Fantastic!

Got all the addresses and telephone numbers.

Hysterical!

What if there were any medical problems - how did they deal with that?

I suppose they went into Newbury, and found a doctor. I don't know, to be honest.

No, I don't know.

No idea. But the van was very well received, wasn't it?

Yes.

And we would drive right around the presenter just to make sure, you know, and I remember just arriving and shouting to more of the remote gates, you know, 'Any women in there? Any women? We've got the van'. And one day we broke down. I was heartbroken. We were outside the common, couldn't actually - obviously before mobile phones and everything. I had to walk bloody miles to find some where to ring up the breakdown people. And we had to be carted back. I think that van died and she got another one. We had to be carted back from the back of the breakdown lorry. So we never got to Greenham that night, and we couldn't even let them know, you know. It was such a shame. But you know that that was it.

So there's quite a lot of support mechanisms on the outside then, weren't there?

Yeah, absolutely. People did fund raising and the stuff...

It felt like we were trying, well it felt like we were part of what was going on when we felt we couldn't leave our lives at home, and we couldn't be camping there. It felt like a good way of supporting.

Yeah, yes.

The spinoffs from that camp were phenomenal. We started a woodcraft folk for young, like minded women. So that we had a generation growing up, not only coming to Greenham, but also learning about, you know, the cooperative in the peace movement, through the woodcraft folk and, you know, it kind of moved us in a new way of kind of planning allies for - yeah, I think there were a lot of spinoffs from it really. I've got photos of the Children for Peace banner in Brussels. So Cameron and Lynette and I went to Brussels for a big, you know, European anti-nuclear demonstration and took the Children for Peace banner.

Well this banner - the second banner went on the only anti Iraq war, as well.

Yeah, it did, you're right. Yeah.

So you've campaigned all your lives, really then?

Yes, never stopped.

We went to Chequers last year when Trump came over. No - did we take the banner?

No.

We should have taken the banner. Yeah. What were we thinking!

Did you stay right until the very end when the camp closed all together?

No, I went, I've got photos in the '90s, but I didn't stay to the end.

No.

I'd moved up here, not that that's any reason, not that far away, but...

I went to Germany.

You went to Germany.

I kept sort of visiting periodically. It felt - there was a loss of momentum...

Towards the end.

Towards the end. And then there were a lot of court cases going on weren't there? But I genuinely can't really remember. Um, but it felt like I don't know. I mean, in some ways, as you say, is it quite a catalyst for us all moving on in our lives, and doing other things.

And I think that's what women are good at doing. It's not like saying, right, we've got this model or this, this focus, and we'll all sit here - it's about you growing as an individual, and deciding for yourself where you feel you can have most effect. So, you know, you would never get blamed by a Greenham woman, for example, that you didn't go back enough times, or carry on, or whatever, because it wasn't about that. It's about your personal journey. And what they did was they said, yeah, like you say it was a stimulus to actually, you were provoked to go on and do other things.

You did a Reclaim the Night just after I went, didn't you? You sent me photos of it.

Yeah.

We did do a Reclaim the Night. That's right. Yeah. Yeah. I think I've got a couple of photos or something - that was in that was reported in the paper and so it's about, you know, kind of how you continue to do

things that that raise these issues in people's minds and stuff. And we went back for the commemoration, official commemoration of the Peace Garden.

When was that - in the '90s?

In 2002.

Oh, 2002!

I used to take my children to the peace garden, when I was living nearby - we used to go quite regularly.

Do you think Greenham is is remembered as well as it should be really, because there's a lot of talk about the Suffragettes?

No, no, it's not.

Do you think so? Everybody I speak to knows what Greenham is.

Well, they have a view of what they think it was. I now live in a village that is tiny and it's Ambridge, but it's not Ambridge! (Laughs). And some of the people that live there, I remember once we were in Book Club and I said something about 'Oh and the Greenham women' (gasps), and they said 'You weren't there?' And that was kind of woah! You know, you can't be a normal human being and have been at Greenham kind of thing, so I think we need to keep bringing it back. I mean, our children remember it, but that's because because they were there.

...and Rosie, she wrote to the Guardian...

I've got that electronically somewhere.

I never saw that.

Didn't you? It's brilliant.

But I don't I don't think it is remembered for all the things it sparked in not only the women that were living there, but women that visited and things like, and the changes it made for them in their personal relationships, in their working relationships. You know, I think it was more powerful, as you said in sort of kind of triggering.

Yeah.

You all felt you changed from the experience?

Oh yeah. So I was up in, near Preston, just over a year ago, for a week of women's art stuff that we were doing up there. And the organisation that ran it - one of the trustees was the first to arrive - we were based in an outdoor education centre. And she came to the door and she said something, and I said something and I said, 'You been at Greenham?' She said 'Yeah, I was at Greenham for months and months'. Her name was Ray. Now she was an interesting woman. She lived in the forest. She lives in the Forest of Dean now, and she has always driven what she calls a truck, because when she finally stopped living at Greenham she just couldn't settle. So she lived her life - I think she means in like a camper van type thing - she called it her truck. And even now, she's a bit older than me, so even now she's, you know, she's like, well on and getting in her 70s and that, she still has a truck. And she's got a little house in the Forest of Dean, but she has to go trucking every now and again because she just can't, you know, and what she's done with her life is constantly support women's organisations that through art and creativity, support the most vulnerable women - they do a lot of work with victims of domestic violence and, and with those that have been, because of their immigration status or whatever - have suffered, you know. So women that have been at Greenham are everywhere, and they are still do doing things. But even then, I think, was it Helen Johns or somebody who died just over a year ago? While we were there. And so Ray said, you know, got we got a fire, you know, we were at Greenham, so we just had to have a fire outside. We had a fire outside

every night, and we heard about this, and she said we need to commemorate the fact she's gone. We had to explain to quite a lot of the women who were there - were all different ages, you see some of them knew nothing about Greenham and her. So I think you know, I do think there's quite a need to keep it alive in some way.

There's certainly a need to keep reminding women that they should be - if they're, if they find something as threatening as that going on, there are things that you can do. You don't have to go out and fight, but there are ways of doing things. I know my, my older sister basically had a breakdown, but she was so terrified what was going on, and I kept saying to get out and do something - come to Greenham with me, because she just, she was.. and she became agoraphobic. She was so terrified that some bomb was going to go off close to her. So it's a it's a - perhaps the more important thing is is about are there things you can do instead of being passive about it? Yes, there's always something you can do. It may not seem as grandiose as some big groups do, and it may seem unstructured. But nevertheless, it's a very powerful thing that goes on.

I remember reading that some scientists had done some research - they'd interviewed children during all of that, and there was a lot of fear around.

A lot of fear.

You know, the advice from government about what to do in case of a nuclear attack would put the wind up - it was so pathetic and stupid. So they interviewed these, these kids in school about, you know, basically how frightened they were, or what they worried them and that kind of thing. And kids that have been on demonstrations and at Greenham and things like that were more - they weren't sanguine, but they were more level headed, and they felt more powerful. They felt a sense of power. They weren't in this complete freakout kind of condition that some of the other children were. It's absolutely - it's really key that children understand, and young people understand there are things that

they can do. And you might not think you're making a difference at the time, but if nothing else you're making a difference to your mental health.

Yeah.

Making a difference to yourself.

Yeah. So yeah, that's a good point, absolutely. And I think the circle's turning now - that young people are beginning to feel that they can be - it's okay to be active....

I hope s... and that that's their role, if you like. Because I think it kind of bottomed out. I mean, I really hope, you know, there's thousands of schools are shut on Friday when they all come out on strike.

Well those wonderful young people in America who are speaking out against - about gun control. And they are just - one particular woman, I just, she's just wonderful.

Absolutely, yeah, so it's really important that this kind of stuff happens, and continues to happen in all sorts of ways. Yeah.

I've got a very close friend who lives in Minnesota - I know that doesn't sound as if it makes sense. But she comes from an incredibly straight kind of background, you know, Lutheran Church, etc, etc. And she's got the knitting circle, and while I was there somehow, something about Greenham came up. And none of those American women knew about it. They all said (gasps) 'We're all going to go home and research this!'

Do you think it deliberately wasn't reported because it was against the American missiles?

Well, they thought that's what it was - against America, where it was against America, it was against the cruise missiles. And, you know, it was our government that gave permission for them to be here. So, but I

was just stunned because they're all women of my age - that none of them have heard of it. Bizarre, but not bizarre, because as you said it was reported.

Do you think the fact that it was a peace movement has had any influence on how it's remembered, or whether it's remembered?

Possibly. Yes, yeah. Because it's, it's not - peace is quite wide, isn't it? You can't - I don't know. When you say peace movement...

I mean, it was a peace protest, really? Do you think the fact it was a peaceful protest...

Oh, a peaceful protest...yeah, because perhaps nobody was killed or...

Well, one woman was killed.

By traffic. Yeah. Not that I'm taking away from it.

But, do you think that fact that it was a peaceful protest has influenced whether it's still in people's minds now?

Well, the media don't like nonviolent direct action, they'd much rather it was violent direct action.

(Laughs).

So you didn't think it was reported as well as it could have been?

They always underestimated the numbers, but they do that for any demo, don't they? I mean if you think of all that stuff when they had those demos in London, where they kettled them or whatever it was called. There probably weren't as many people on those demos as they have been on lots of CND, demos, and other demos and they don't get a mention. I mean, I've been on we've been on demos where they've been thousands and thousands of people, and it doesn't even make the news.

The anti Iraq one, and you know, so you can understand to some extent people say, 'Well, what's the point?' When you think what Blair did after that one.

But I think actually seeings as the media can devote an awful lot of attention to Brexit every single bloody day (laughs), they could easily report on a huge march or, or things like Greenham where - I suppose the thing is that it was a very consistent thing. So being the news...

It was there a long time?

Yes, it had lost its newsworthy appeal.

And it is also bound up with the fact, let's face it, anything that women do, you know, in any aspect of the media is not reported as much, as well, as fairly as it is, you know, when men get involved in things. So you know, that's part of how... yeah.

Thinking about - there was a lot of music - you've got the music, but was there a lot of art in the camp as well?

Well, that was when - I well, our banner. Let's face it we all made, I mean, the first, banner....

I have to own up. What surprised me about Greenham, because I'm not a particularly creative person - that when you went and you saw what was on, for example, the fence and the way women came and represented them and their families, mind your tea cup, don't spill it.

So we did do lots of creative things. I mean, I must admit, I always took my paints and things down there. But I'm a designer artist, so I would do that sort of thing. Yeah, I think there was a lot of creativity with a lot of the banners. Oh, is that this one? That is this one, isn't it?

Yeah.

But there's one of the original one, which was even like...

That's lovely.

It's just such a shame, but each woman, or group of women, or women and children...

Made their own banner?

Made their own square and then put it all together.

Yeah.

I remember doing the...

Mum must have donated the curtain lining.

Yeah.

Oh that was you?

Put it together.

Had lots of the...

Where's that one of the original one? The original one - we put so much time and effort into that.

Yeah.

And then some louts drove past and stole it. Oh, look, there's the dragon one.

Yeah, so we did you know that one 'cause that was a whole weekend about dragons at Greenham. So yeah.

We'll have to take a photo.

Oh yeah.

Where's the original banner? Its here somewhere.

This is the 10 days.

So why did you choose dragon?

Why the dragons? Why dragons I think because...

I'm trying to remember...

Fire and standing, you know...

There it is, oh god it was lovely. It was beautiful.

Somebody stole that, did you say?

Yeah, we just camped on at Red Gate, and we were all on the other side of the road. We hung it up on the fence on the other side of the road. And this car just came screeching to a halt. They hurled a load of abuse, dragged the banner off the fence and drove off. We all went 'bastards!'

We did I mean, as always you use banners. So, I mean, with the woodcraft, we started up the Downley peace group, do you remember? Which is just an area of Wycombe. So we would go into the carnivals and, you know, all that kind of thing was our Downley peace group.

We did so many different, we had a day on the ride, didn't we? Which was the peace fair.

Oh yes!

And we had the CND balloon, do you remember?

Yeah.

Yeah.

And did a tug of peace and things like that. You know, we did a hell of a lot...

We did do.

... for CND, for Greenham, for the wider peace movement.

Yeah.

Right in the heart...

I think we were just trying to get the message out, just trying to get people to think. And do you remember on Frogmore when we actually, we had the book about how to keep yourself safe in the case of a nuclear attack, and we reenacted that and showed people how to you know...

Get a table.

...get a table how to make a coffin out of a cardboard box should Auntie May snuff it. (Laughs). It's like 'Now this is the kind of protection that will will keep you safe'. And people will just go are you having a laugh? We are actually! (Laughs). But this government guidance on what you should do.

So thinking about the banners, if you could think of one representation of Greenham - artistically, what do you think it would be?

Fire, it'd have to be fire.

Spider's web?

Do you think the spider web?

Spider web appeared everywhere.

I suppose it did. Yeah.

That symbol.

'Cause that was the whole thing about Greenham women are everywhere, wasn't it?

Yeah.

The web.

Yeah.

Because there were the women that were at the centre actually living there. And then here is this web of women supporting them, spreading out and spreading their ideas.

Yeah, that's true.

There's one image that keeps coming back to me. But, and it was this woman that I met. I can't remember which gates used to go to, but she was in her 70s then - I couldn't believe that she was camping there. She had arthritis and all sorts, but she had a blackout curtain from the Second World War, and she'd embroidered a rose on it, and said 'Never again, not in my name' embroidered around it. And that always struck me as very - it's just the image that stayed in my mind, but I think I agree. I think that the cobweb was the thing that was good.

Oh dear, we've lost our letters!

What's missing?

The N in nuclear!

Except it's lost an A.

Oh the A has gone!

When do you want to take the photograph?

Yeah.

Whenever you're finished.

Do you want to take the photo? Have you got any other questions you particularly wanted to ask us?

Probably - think about, we talked about the education didn't we? And we did talk about being portrayed by the media, but you didn't think you were portrayed too well, did you? At the time by the media? Did you feel it was...

Now I don't think we were portrayed very well. There was...

I think they were scared.

There was often a weird thing about the way Greenham women smelt! (Laughs). That always seemed to make the papers, didn't it?

You did smell after you've been there a while. I remember once going, and you'd been there longer than me, and I went up and put my arms around you - gave you a hug and thought 'Oh, my God'! And then because within a day I smelt the same.

Because you're right next to fire all time, and it really it's quite a - it can get a bit rancid, can't it?

Especially when you're not having a shower and your hair's not getting washed (laughs). So yes, there's quite portrayal of us being smelly, like smelly tramps. Well, of course, a lot of women you know, because you have to go and get, um fill up the water containers, and go to get food. So there was, and of-course, you always had all your badges on and everything else. And yeah, and you did smell like you lived outdoors next to a bonfire all the time.

Not, not dreadfully then, just really outdoor-y smell rather than... were they just picking on that as a criticism, did you feel?

Sorry?

Were they just picking on that as a criticism of you rather than it was actually a problem?

Yes.

We should have been at home in Laura Ashley.

Yeah, we were just not doing what was expected of us.

And when they went to court, the, you know, the women just challenged everything about you know, and they hate, there was no, yeah, they didn't necessarily break the law at the court, you know, but they, they did just challenge everything. They weren't subservient. They weren't. And they hated that. I mean, if you've been to Newbury - have you been to Newbury? You know, it's, it's quite funny, really, that that was the kind of place near where it all happened, because you can't imagine anywhere where they, you know, generally speaking, the population would have been more shocked by it all. I remember going up to the CND conference in Sheffield about that time, and thinking that Sheffield was the most fantastic place I wanted to move there

tomorrow, because nobody looked at you peculiarly because you had a CND badge on, and you know everybody was kind of a bit right on, and it was kind of like yeah. But poor old Newbury.

Newbury is a typical market town - although in later years I worked for probation and covered Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, and discovered that the Newbury of the surface - like any time, like Oxford or whatever it has real areas of deprivation and poverty and...

And yeah, and over time all towns have become less monolithic or whatever than they were.

But it was a very small market town, a lovely little town...in Newbury.

How did you feel when the camp closed? Did it make you feel sad, or feel that you'd won?

A mixture. I think it was a mixture, I think because as you said before about how so many women got so many things out of it, and their lives changed so much - you felt like you've moved on. So because it was coming in such dribs and drabs, there were various court cases about whether the common should revert to being a common, and all sorts of things. And there was a stop, start, stop start thing about where cruise was going to remain or not. It sort of in some ways petered out, and you almost felt like it had shut from what it was, anyway.

Because they tried to say the decision to remove them wasn't because of the women didn't they? How did you feel about that?

I didn't care as long as they were gone. I didn't care! (Laughs).

What else would you have expected them to say? I mean we didn't get rid of nuclear weapons, they moved them - well, I think they're still trundling up and down the mainland on on the back of bloody trains, but then there aren't the, they're not moving them on the road like they were then. They stuck them up in Faslane, you know, so

something scared them where they are to stick them up where they were completely kind of out of reach. And they've got no imagination, in terms of the fact that they not only do they still cling to the idea that we need these nuclear weapons, but they also propagate that the, the nonsense that we need to make them Sellafield, and all these, whatever they call it these days, and all these stupid places, and how - because they've got no imagination that all those skills and those resources can be used to a different end. You know, they didn't hold on to Molesworth for long, because we did actions at Molesworth, which is Cambridgeshire / Huntingdonshire, where people have gone and literally ploughed up the land where they were going to put a new site on there, and grew things and then they got rid of all that, didn't they? But they that didn't last very long. So I think actually, it might not be the women as such, but the continual unrest, if you like, and refusing to accept that just because the government makes a policy, you have to go along with it. Actually, it niggled them, and I think the Americans did decide in the end that they didn't want the hassle. And they still, you know, they still hold sway in terms of the communications, don't they? What's that place on the way to Oxford, where the great big golf ball is and all the rest of it, you know, we still do all their dirty work for them in terms of telecommunications and that, but we have fewer, and I think it possibly helped to move to the point where there was some agreement about getting rid of some of the nuclear weapons totally - reducing the arsenal, you know, because, because it was a needle in the side, they just - the peace movement as such, and never, never gave up. But it yeah, it was sad in some respects, but it had done its work. And it's so much lovelier to think that people are using that space now, and growing things there. And I see through the Wildlife Trust news, there's so many walks and they're sighting all these birds and you know, it's fantastic, that what a much better use of a piece of land that what they stupidly used it for.

And at Greenham some buildings turned into a sort of social enterprise?

Yeah, really sensible use of stuff, yeah absolutely yeah but we still have Daws Hill, don't we? Strike Command is still there.

Strike Command is still there.

Because they built that new bunker there didn't they?

What at Strike Command?

Yeah.

Well it's not new, they built it when Oliver was born. I remember taking him as a baby, because somebody camped up the top of the crane, didn't they?

Yeah, yeah.

Strike Command expanded.

And Daws Hill had some work done, because we had all those kids come and stay with us - young men and women that stayed with us the night before because they were all going up to do an action at Daws Hill, and they had to get up there to try and disrupt the building people - the contractors before they came on site. Well you see some of that kind of spirit is now being used against fracking, isn't it? Yeah, you know...

Environmental issues.

It's, it's the environmental stuff, you know, and it's all, it's all born out of the same kind of refusing to accept that people have got MP behind their name and know what the hell they are doin.

It's, it was more than, that I think that a lot of those movements were about empowering you to be able to take action when you disagreed with policies that were just being imposed on you, as they still are. You feel like you can do something about this. You don't just have to sit back and think, 'Oh, well, my MP doesn't listen to me'.

Do you think any of the court actions upset the camp, or do you think they just united them more?

I didn't get the impression that they were upset about it. I got the impression that it was a way of getting a bit more news about it. I mean, obviously women did not want to go to jail. But it was almost an acceptance - well, if that has to happen, if that has to be part of the action we're taking then so be it. I didn't get the impression ever anybody thought this was outrageous or anything that...

It was just part of the campaign?

Yeah, I think there was some talk, certainly, and seeing it in the same light as Suffragettes taking action, and having to take the consequences.

Yeah.

Do you think in any, any political people opposed to your - to Greenham, tried to infiltrate the camp at all? Did you get any of that? Try and influence the people in the camp?

No idea if there were any undercover cops, no idea.

Not so much undercover, but just generally trying to change your mind?

No. They would have been their doctor been undercover would make like being open and come in and said 'I don't agree what you said', 'Okay sit down have a cup of tea let's..'

Yeah. Oh it works Yeah.

My son shut the car keys in the car when we went down once and we were camping at Red Gate, and because you could do that in those days with cars, and there was nothing for it - I had to go and call somebody out. We tried everything - could not break into this car. So

we had to go and call the RAC out. And we said you know we'll stand on the road and wave you down, because we have to take him into the woodland to find out where the car was parked and everything, and this little young man got out - do you remember he was freaked to death!

Absolutely terrified.

He'd come to (adopts spooky voice) Greenham common! And you know, in no time at all he got a thing like a ruler and he opened up the car, and we said 'Do you want a cup of tea? Come sit down'. He said, 'Am I allowed?' (Laughs). We said 'Of-course you are, come and have a cup of tea, but you can't stay the night.' Because you know. So there was, you know, it's all, it's really interesting, it's all to do with sort of sexual politics and power politics.

And I think it's to do with a lot of assumptions as well.

Of-course.

Because, you know, because remember when we went - it was, it was you wasn't it who was in the car with me when we did a cruise convoy?

I remember doing a cruise convoy.

In the Jag.

In the Jag.

So it, my ex husband was earning loads of money, and I don't know, he liked Jaguars. So we decided to go on this cruise convoy in the Jag, and of-course every police checkpoint you get to, 'Is a problem, officer?' 'Oh no, madam'. Just assumed we were locals you know, 'Go on, carry on through.' I mean we had dressed up a little bit to sort of look the part.

(Laughs).

But we got places nobody else did because of the car.

Oh yeah, well I mean there's a huge amount of assumptions of all kinds by RAC men and police men.

Absolutely.

If you if you look as they expect, or don't expect, whatever you get treated differently.

(Edit in recording).

Great - I've got a green one at home.

Oh yes, I remember the big one a bigger one, wasn't it.

Yes, of-course because it was also...

This one - A Little Help From Our Friends. 'What would you do if I close down your base? Would you fire silver bullets at me?'

What was the 'Do Ron Ron one'? There was one about Ronald Reagan, wasn't there?

Oh yeah, hold on.

(The women start humming the tune of 'Da Doo Ron Ron Ron')

(All singing) 'You do Ron, Ron, Ron, you do Ron Ron'.

Can't for the life of me remember what else it was!

There's a whole in your fence?

Yes!

(Singing) 'There's a hole in your fence, dear Ronnie, dear Ronnie,
There's a hole in your fence, dear Ronnie.'

There we go!

(All singing) 'There's a hole in your fence..., oh yes! '...dear major, dear major, there's a hole in your fence, dear major, a hole. Then fix it dear private, dear private, dear private, then fix it dear private, that hole in the fence. But the women are cutting it, dear major, dear major, but the women are cutting it the fence. Then arrest them dear private, dear private, dear private, then arrest them dear private for breaching defense. But that doesn't stop them, dear major, dear major, these women keep cutting, keep cutting that fence. Then shoot them dear private, dear private, dear private, then shoot them dear private for breaching the peace. But the women are singing, dear major, dear major, but the women are singing, these women for peace.'

(All singing) 'I met him in the white house with a spencer on, doo doo ron ron ron ron ron. And then he took me to the Pentagon, doo doo ron ron ron ron ron. Yeah, he looked so nice, we're the sacrifice, that's how he set us up, doo doo ron ron ron ron ron. Finger on the trigger and persuasive voices, doo doo ron ron ron ron ron. And then he told us that we had no choice. Doo doo ron ron ron ron ron.'

(Laughs)

That's it.

That's it.

(Laughs).

I liked that one.

I remembered that one.

Wait a minute. Where's the witches one for heaven's sake?

(Singing) 'We are the witches. Where do we e come from? Maybe your great great grandmother was one. Witches are wise wise women they say, there's a lot of witch in every woman today.'

(Laughs)

I sing that with my granddaughter!

Absolutely.

I think I do as well, it's very important that they know witches are wise, wise women.

(Edit in recording).

So there were quite a few of us who would come up and when I mean - do you remember dear old Dot?

Oh, Dot! Do you know I had a photo - I couldn't remember her name - of-course it was Dot!

And Maggie who lived down the road from me, and brought some of the woodcraft folk up with us. And I saw Alexis...

Heather.

Heather Jackson - had lunch with her the other day. So everybody kind of just goes on doing stuff, and you know being active in different ways and things, you know.

Thank you.

Can you explain the Save the Night?

Reclaim the Night.

I did find that night that song, but I can't remember the tune!

What it was about - it was basically that there was a rise in the number of attacks on women in Wycombe, and so a group of women walked around the streets at night singing and chanting, to just reclaim - to say, you know because the reaction is always - if there is violence against women, don't go out - so they curfew women.

Yeah, yeah.

When actually common-sensically, you should curfew the men.

Yes.

They've done them in London as well.

Oh, yeah, there were quite a big thing. It's just that because there was this rise in Wycombe. They did a Reclaim the Night.

(Edit in recording).

You'd make this porridge in a great big saucepan. And then if it was your turn to do the washing up, oh my god - the porridge pot!

And everything had bits of wood ash in it, didn't it?

Wasn't complete unless it had wood ash floating on the top.

Like any camping expedition, you know when you cook on an open fire.

And we always cooked - when we were doing the support van...

Had to be vegan.

We cooked vegetarian.

Well actually, it was the first time I came across veganism. Tried always to give some vegan options for something a bit more exciting!

Yes, it was a bit challenging for those that hadn't sort of cooked for vegetarians before. And then Barbara had already gone vegetarian I can't remember.

Yeah, I was veggie then.

My husband said that I saw how much it pissed her husband off that she'd gone vegetarian and I went vegetarian!

(Laughs). But it did make me realise that you know, you could eat very well if you cooked for vegetarians.

Yeah.

Where did you get the food from?

Containers that we took the food in, very well organised.

It was very well organised, and I used to have this great big water container, but the thing that I remember is not Greenham, but the Nap Hill peace camp. Not Nap Hill - Daw's Hill, when I took the big water container to the garage to get it filled, and I had it in the back of the 2CV, and I just, I don't know - I must have been a dozy spell and didn't put the top back on properly - it fell over. Next thing I knew I'm driving along, with a lake of water in the well of - it was literally that deep in the well of the car! So I got to the peace camp, and the 2CV is so light, all the guys got one side and just lifted it up, tipped it out, it was like perfect!

I once collected two storage heaters for mum and dad in my 2CV.

Brilliant. I've had a wardrobe in the back before.

Never seen a car drive like that before. Why it couldn't go in anybody else's car don't know.

My car's still going - my 2CV.

I thought you might be in it today, actually.

I did think about it, but too far, too far. I drive it round locally once a week. Not - too far to come all the way up here.

How did you arrange the food?

When we went to Greenham? Well I suppose because we didn't go for months and months on end, we kind of just took a bit of this, and somebody else said 'I'll take a bit of the other', and it's kind of locked up. If needs be somebody would go off in a car and buy some more provisions.

I think there was just an acceptance if somebody had some money and they were happy to spend it, that was good. There were never any discussions about whether you could afford it or not, there was a sort of an assumption that you wouldn't offer unless you could afford it.

(Whilst they eat). It's nice that bread - I'll have a little bit more.

I think I remember the food as been excellent

Yes.

I think it's because there was a great variety, and it was all vegetarian so.

And you're outside in the open air.

And you're hungry.

Yeah.

And the kids ate well, didn't they?

Yeah.

They did.

Did some people go sort of go home at weekends, or if the people stayed, did they just stay and that was it?

No, it was a real mixture.

Yeah.

A real mish-mash.

I know there were times if I just felt like it, I would just go down there, and if I wanted to stay overnight, I would just stay overnight but - I didn't, I didn't always go with a group.

You go down...?

Just on your own.

I would go overnight on my own. When Mike was home, okay I'll take, and I could do a bailiffs watch.

I think we did a bailiffs watch together.

It's hard isn't it, staying awake, really hard.

What was the bailiffs watch?

Just trying to protect the benders.

Yeah, so you try to stay awake while everyone else was asleep. And it was hard work.

I must have done that on my own, because I can remember driving back from Newbury on my own.

Ah, okay.

But not always, but I must have done it at least once on my own. And again, it would have been when mum was there, because she wasn't there that much, or someone had the kids, maybe we swapped them, which is what we often did.

Depended on your life at the time. My son was about two or three the first time we went now down, my daughter is much older so ...

I don't think she ever went down.

She, she was a teenager.

Do you think there would be another long term peace protest like that again? Or do you think it was of its time?

Think if the circumstances far right, I can imagine it happening again.

They say we've got people objecting to fracking. So you can see a small element of it. It just has to be the right thing, at the right place, the right time. And if people are angry enough about it, and feel they can do something about it. Yeah, I can imagine it happening again.

Because it was a long time, wasn't it? It was quite a few years.

Was it '83 it started or '82?

I think I think I've got photos of '82.

Yeah. I think it was.

I've got '82s and '83s, because I remember it was around when Ollie was born.

When was the original march from...

'81.

So Surround the Base would have been that December '81.

It was in the middle of winter.

I thought it was later.

Was it?

So December the next year?

Actually I did go to Surround the Base, because that's when I walked into Annie Lennox. I was so gobsmacked that was about a mile later, I finally got my breath and told you all, and you all went mad that I hadn't pointed her out at the time.

Say that again, I'm going deaf.

I bumped into Annie Lennox.

Oh, yes!

And I was so starstruck, I couldn't say anything. So, and I do remember that was Surround the Base, so I don't know where it fitted with Ollie - whether it was just after he was born or - I remember going to one demo really really heavily pregnant. Because a police officer was being a bit

bolshy, and I was saying 'Stop being bossy, I will demand you remove your cape and protect me while I wee.' Because apparently there's still a law under statute that a police officer has to offer their cape to a pregnant woman - or there was then - so that they could wee.

(Laughs).

Did he have a cape?

No. And he tried really hard to stay stonyfaced and in the end, both of us ended up laughing because he said 'I don't have a cape', I said 'Your trousers will do!'

I can remember very serious discussion between you and I in your kitchen once before we went to Greenham, because you had taken the decision that the time is now right to be arrested.

Oh yes! (Laughs).

Off we went, and we'd got all these complicated systems in place for if you were arrested how we were going to cover the boys, and all the rest of it. And you kept trying to get arrested, and of-course you're quite short, they just kept ignoring you! (Laughs!). And we had to go home.

They did! I struggled to get arrested all around the country. (Laughs). Keir - my oldest son, I said to him, 'Will you record the news tonight?' Dammit, I can't remember the name of the base in Nottinghamshire. Anyway, so we went up there, and we were just generally being playful, really. (Laughs). He was recording the news and he's like, 'Oh good. Yes, this is the right bit - oh look at that woman climbing up that statue, and oh god, it's her!' (Laughs). And I'm still trying to get arrested then, and this MOD policeman just kept going 'No, go on. Get away. Just move on. Move on'. 'I'm here as a serious matter. I am trying to make you understand what's going on, and he was like, 'Yeah, just just' - I'm trying to get arrested here! I made this decision.

I remember... (inaudible), that was lovely.

Oh yes.

And the women (sings) 'and we are singing, singing for our lives'. Sheila can sing, I can't really.

(Sings) 'we are women and we are singing'

No, that was another one. But I can't remember that one. Someone?

Oh, the bailiff song.

So have you got all the photos that you want? Or...

(Inaudible response)

No, rush.

Do you want us to pick out ones that we... Okay.

Here it is - the one you were just singing 'We are women and we are singing, Something, ciao bella. Ciao, ciao, ciao, bella. Ciao. Ciao, ciao, we have singing for liberation. We want a non-violent revolution now.' So that was Greenham, and that was '92.

I'm gonna get my phone because I want to take some photos.

That was the only two I got of that.

Oh my God, that's me. Oh god! (Laughs). I'd forgotten. I used to have very different colored hair. Used to, like... the lead singer of that one, 'All she wants is another woman' - who sang that? Because every time I see her on the Top of the Pops 2 or whatever, I always think - it's Mockie!

I read one woman's thing, looking at research, and she said she looked back on Greenham with such fondness, and then she read something she'd written at the time. And she couldn't bring back the intense feeling she'd had at the time. You know, how recollection had changed from the intensity of the time. Do you feel that yourselves you feel you've - you see it back...

Well I do, but I mean, we were very young at the time and we're in our 30s and, you know, everything seems ahead of you, and you feel like your can really make an impact, and it felt like we were doing something so important. And that was going to make a difference, so you wouldn't expect to replicate that, I don't think.

When you look back?

I'm just doing in awe of myself. I was working. I'd got two kids. I was doing, I was doing loads of kind of, you know, campaigning and still running the Action Aid group to start with, and running people to karate. And whatever, you know, and Mike - my husband, worked abroad a lot. And I don't know you just kind of - you do it, don't you.

Yeah, you've got all the energy when you're young.

Yeah.

Yeah, I suppose, and you know, I think we were very good forming networks. I'm always amazed at how much that I hear - I keep hearing about, my grandchildren and their parents, talking about having to get loads of child, you know, babysitters and everything - what's happened to all the baby banks, do they not exist anymore?

No, babysitting circles and things. They don't happen in the same way...

It felt like...

And when you just used to arrange things, and toys in the corner for the kids, and they'd get on with it. Or you say, 'Oh, we'll, run a creche', well you can't run a crèche these days. You know? If you don't want the kids in with - while you're doing whatever you're doing, you know.

See you've got to have people that are...

Yes.

Police...

Certified whatever. You can't just say we'll take it and turn to run the crèche.

So there was more of a community then, really then - than now?

I suppose.

It's different.

It was different?

Yeah, it was different times and I don't think our expectation expectations were at all the same as current generations. Um, we - I suppose we'd grown up not expecting a huge amount. But in some ways, maybe we were more liberated. You know, we felt like we could do almost anything if we put our minds to it. It was, I don't know. I was saying earlier, I thought perhaps it could happen in the right place at the right time, but I don't know. I don't know. I was amazed at the Women's march that we went on.

The number of young women amazing.

The January for...

Women's March.

Yeah, but they were all young, we felt really old. It was brilliant.

Oh, absolutely.

They're all so young!

(Edit in recording).

The one year that...on the road, there just happened to be a gate and a space around it, so I'm not sure how anybody would have camped there. No, actually, no, I remember stopping there to give food. So there must have been enough space to have a tent or two, or perhaps they went on the other side of the road and camped. And then there were others that were off the beaten track a bit, you know, where, women could come out into the woods...

So ...comfortable at some gates, but absolutely not at other and didn't actually feel like we were really welcome there?

Oh, yeah, I mean, I think that Yellow Gate could be a bit intimidating. I think though, you know, as we said there were many people, and there were definitely some women there who had a - maybe gave off the vibes that they were the true Greenham common women because they were there since it had been....They may have been, there was certainly a few women like that. I mean when you live like that.

Sorry, I can't hear you.

I was just saying, Christine was asking about whether there was a different feeling at some of the gates, and that some women, when interviewed said that they felt intimidated by - not welcome at some of the gates.

Yellow Gate was a harder place to go to. But then they went through an awful lot of tough times.

Absolutely.

I don't blame them.

But they could be a bit intimidating.

Yeah.

I mean, you know, for some women rocking up there, just the appearance of some of the women would have been a bit intimidating.

Oh, yeah.

Because, you know, I remember the first time I went and spoke to a woman who obviously got hair coming out of a mole, and she'd never let - never cut it off. It hadn't bothered her. So she had this long wispy stream coming coming down here. And I couldn't take my eyes off it.

(Laughs).

And it kind of like it challenged me to think about why I should assume that it was or it wasn't okay to walk around with long whiskers, as a woman. She was quite young. You know?

And I think a lot of us, I mean, even if we did have so called radical views, we all had very unassuming middle class lives, and I think there are a lot of women who went down who were much, much less exposed even than we were. And I think they, they possibly did find it a bit intimidating.

And 'cause people got - Paul McCartney got short shrift when he turned up, you know...

Did he? Good!

Just assuming that he'd come to be...

I have a vague memory of that.

Yeah, 'cause I mean why would you assume that somebody like that...

Could be anybody actually.

No. There was there was somebody who was interviewing from a paper or something one time, and they kept going on and on about this thing of 'Why, why do you want to make it women only? Why has it gone to be women only?' and I said 'Listen, do you know how many peace camps there are around this country? There's tons of them - why can't we have one where we feel we own this space?'

Flying pickets - that's just been going through my head, when you were talking about men that supported - they used to run the crèche against sexism.

Oh yes.

And then they'd sing at the end.

Yeah. There were so many ways in which men could support, without being there.

Yes, they didn't have to be. During the day they come bring food....

(Edit in recording).

I mean, I would say the biggest thing for me is that, you know, it was a formative experience. You know, whatever the outcome of it, you know, which will be debated in the history books forever and a day, actually, it was the formative experience for me. And I think that for all those thousands and thousands of women, some of whom might never have actually gone to Greenham common, but followed it in the newspapers,

or sent donations, or had a relative who went, or whatever it was, that was all - it was also formative for them. And I can't stand it when people talk about pounds, shillings and pence for all these things. 'Oh. Do you know how much it costs to police this?' Or whatever. You know that, of-course it matters but in the big sphere of things, in terms of how much all sorts of dreadful mistakes by government and things cost the country, it was an invaluable, educative, formative experience for anybody who was associated with it. And, you know, we talked a lot about our children because they were entrenched in it, whatever they, whatever has happened to them they've never forgotten, and I think it will have given them more, it have an educative effect for them too, actually.

God yes.

...Singing 'Nothing like a Dame'.

(Laughs).

Do you remember that? She used to sing that - she had a version of it.

Who did?

Sue Ifold, singing 'Nothing like a Dame. She's stood here in this photo, she's clearly singing. We're all laughing.

We taught that, we were shown that by talking about all the other things we've done from it. And you know, most of my photos actually aren't of Greenham, they were of all the other things we were doing. Other demos and other events and other happenings to continue to get the story out there - the questions out there about why are we trapped in this nonsense of having these weapons we can never use?

Exactly. I mean, you talked about expense - pounds, shillings and pence - the expense of policing some of the things that went on at Greenham, compared to the billions and billions that are spent on nuclear weapons,

but as you say, you hope would never ever be used, but in the current circumstances...

Is bigger waste of money?

Exactly. I just think that's a monumental waste.

The world will never learn. Well, you know, the men in power never learn that, you know, we had Chernobyl. We've had the, what was it in Japan where the nuclear power station?

Oh yes.

You know, a few years ago.

I've forgotten the name.

You know, it just goes on and on...

Fukushima.

Yeah, and it never, never kind of.

No, it doesn't seem to stop. If anything, I mean, politics has got worse now - more sound bite-y, and more posturing...

And less effective?

Less effective.

Well it's certainly less participative isn't it? My Goodness me. You know people don't - they're just, people are so bloody ignorant about politics, you know, they knocked it out of our education - do you know I was in the baker's yesterday, and some bloke gone in there to get a sandwich. And he said he was going on a fag run before Brexit - for his cheap fags.

Oh for god's sake.

And he said, I said, 'I can't stand all this nonsense going on now and the two women 'oh yeah, yeah yeah' - behind the counter. He said, he said, 'We had that vote,' he said, 'We should have come out the next day. Instead of all this faffing around'. I mean, it just left you speechless!

It does, doesn't it.

Wait, what you know.

Took us 10 years to negotiate our way in, and they think what...legal commitments, everything.

I think our children had a political, small p, education.

Oh god yes.

Being involved in all this, didn't they?

Oh god yes.

The woodcraft folk, all the stuff we did there, cooperative stuff, environmental issues.

I just found the photos of the hen house.

Oh the hen house!

Isn't it gorgeous! I'd forgotten just how wonderful - wasn't that set up by a woman who was at Greenham?

Yeah, Christine.

Oh, Chris.

Here I am!

Oh it's you!

I thought it was Chris.

Lady of the manor!

With her hair permed.

Do you remember we found a rusty old bike outside? I kept it, you sat on the handle bars and sang 'Raindrops keep falling on your head', like that!

(Laughs).

It was near...

There's Ollie.

So do you think peaceful protests, they are - talking about pounds, shillings, and pence - hey are much cheaper than trying to police an aggressive - like that one in France at the minute. So do you think peaceful protests are more effective or just cost less?

More effective in...?

In getting done what they're protesting - in getting the thing changed that they're protesting against?

Well, obviously you like to think that you're having some major effect. The reality possibly is that often, programs get pulled by governments because they cost too much. But I would hope that they are swayed by the numbers that get out there and register their protest. That's all you can hope for, isn't it?

I don't think that you can compare it to France because it's just a different context.

I was just thinking that the amount of aggression there is in protests in France at the moment, and that must - you were talking about the cost, they were saying the cost of the peace protests, but I mean, something like the aggression in France but must be far more expensive?

But we have horribly aggressive protests in this country, don't www arrested?

Oh, Robinson.

Yeah, Tony (N.B. I think she means Tommy) Robinson and all those kinds of things are horribly aggressive, horribly aggressive, and do cost a lot of money.

Yes, yeah.

Yeah.

Absolutely, but they get the media coverage, my god and, and they sway people's thinking because we have such a rubbish education system in this country - we don't have a participative democracy in any shape, you know, that's why the government didn't want to have a second referendum, because they don't want all the citizens - if they did it properly, the citizens forums and all the rest of it, which which actually would help people to have to make their mind up either way in a rational and educated way. I mean the Southern Irish are showing us how to do it with the abortion.

Yes.

Abortion issue, haven't they? That's a really best practice model of what they've done there. I mean, it's hard work. It takes a lot of time.

Well, this is what I was thinking about Greenham - it took a long time. Although they protest at the end it was their decision, it was the push of the years of the peace protest.

It wouldn't have happened without - that dialogue wouldn't have been going on.

No, that's true of almost anything. If there isn't a backlash from people, if there isn't - if we all, what's the phrase - 'It only takes good people to do nothing.'

Yes that's it.

I can't remember the quote. But you know what I mean is if we did nothing, that would be just criminal.

That's completely fallen to pieces, Barbara.

I know, there's some fabulous photos in here, my word. Oh look, there's Ollie - that shows how tiny he was, you're still carrying him.

But then you know I always think as well that peaceful protest has to be the best form, because you're showing yourself in your best light. You're not sinking down to any level of violence or anything else. I mean...

And I think it can be some of the bravest, or the most courageous kind of protest, actually can't it?

Yes. It's very easy to pick something up and swing it at somebody, not just to stand there - there was that classic example, wasn't there, of that woman who looked at somebody who was saying some really racist and horrible stuff, and she just kept smiling at him. And he backed down. So it yeah, it can be some of the most courageous stuff - like there's a there's a man in Milton Keynes, who's done non-violent direct action forever and a day - he's in his 50s. Now he goes up to Faslane, and

swims - swims through the locks to put things on the submarines to show them that their defense systems are rubbish.

That's wonderful - now that is fabulous isn't it.

He's always over in Palestine, you know, standing - monitoring the Israeli aggression towards Palestinians and things like that. Some of the bravest stuff out.

It made a case thought.

Yeah, I was remembering for various reasons - my, my teacher at school who taught me German, and I married the deputy headmaster's son - of that school. And my father in law was great friends with this man who taught me German. My father in law was very military bound, and was very involved in the Second World War. But my German teacher had been a conscientious objector. And Herbert was the gentlest, loveliest man, and I can remember my father in law Doug, just sitting there going 'I have so much respect for Herbert, he showed courage that I couldn't have shown', and Doug got a bloody George medal, you know? So he respected the sacrifice it took to say 'No, not in my name'.

Yeah.

Those...

Just want to send Oliver buckets of very embarrassing photos!

Good idea!

I hesitate to call it a photo album but when I got that falling to pieces collection of photos out, it smell horrible because it was smelling of damp because it had been shoved in the back of the bookcase.

Oh do you know I remember that - oh dear oh dear! I can't remember yesterday!

(Laughs).

And there's Sheila running the half marathon in Wycombe.

Oh yeah.

On behalf of CND.

Yes.

Embarrassing thing is that I looked at that and thought 'What am I doing there? It's not me, it's you'.

(Laughs).

One of the things I am supposed to include is why do you think it's important that Greenham is remembered by subsequent generations? That was one of the things I'm supposed to ask you.

Well, why do we think it's important that the Suffragist movement is remembered?

Yes, that is more...

Why do we, why do we think it's important to remember - what was her name, the woman that was involved in the first computer... anyway why do we...

Ada Lovelace.

Because it reminds next generation, this generation, that anybody is capable of achieving things. Their voices should be heard, there are many different viewpoints around every subject, that actually the way our country runs is the business of everybody that lives in it, you know, all that sort of thing, I guess.

I think for me, it was that it should be remembered as the start of something that was organic, in shape. It was - so unlike the Suffragettes, who had quite a structure, we did away with anything like that. There was nobody in charge, it was simply a collective voice, and it became - well for me, it was about a voice of a generation.

Yes, it was of its time.

Yeah. And it, I think it's, it marked a turning point for me in the way that things could be done, they didn't need to have a structure, okay, things might move a bit more quickly. But actually, if you've got that, that collective working, that to me produced the most creative results, the most interesting things happened that way. And I know this is sad to say, but it was one of the reasons why I went to work with John Lewis, because they work in quite a collective way. And it was, it was important to me that if I was going to go back into the world of work in a very corporate way, that it had to be something that had that kind of loose structure to it.

Each person mattered rather than...

Exactly.

Each voice mattered and should be heard.

Yeah, I think that's really important, actually. And that's really important why young people today need to hear about Greenham common, because of that essence. Because actually, society has moved to stop all of that - we talked about impromptu creches. You can't do that. Now you've got to be licensed for this. And duh duh duh duh duh. We know that people in industry have - yes, it's right, that health and safety and everything like that should improve. But actually, it swung very much the way where the present situation people can have zero hours, they don't know where they're going to work from one way or another. That's all about the business being the, and the profit being the most important

thing and the, you know, so you've lost that kind of, I mean 100 or 200 years ago, it would have been a kind of paternalistic, Cadbury style - 'I want my workers to be healthy, so they produce the most, therefore I'll make sure they live in nice houses, or reasonable housing', and all the rest of it. And then in the '60s and '70s and that, it was like well, we're doing it because everybody's voice matters, and the collective good - if everyone, whereas now it's swung to this actually the be all and end all is to make money, and we've got this huge disparity - this more and more unequal society day by day. So it's very important to see that there are movements and there's a history, which is about good things happening where people come together, explore issues, campaign together and all the rest of it. Actually it is really important that that story is heard.

And I do think that time was also the start of people being more being more open to challenge.

Yeah.

So is it okay to have a mole with hair that comes down to your knees?

Yeah.

Is it okay to be gender fluid? Is it okay to have radical views? But you know, everything was out there and nothing was off limits was it?

Yeah.

And accepted for what it was?

And accepted for just what it was. Yeah, so I think for me Greenham - that's probably why that should be remembered in that way. I mean, I'm really proud of everything that we did at that time. We did so much, we just never stopped. Did we?

No.

Thinking about it now!

But it was kind of satisfying and enjoyable. And, you know, I mean, I can't believe that I'd work full time. You know, come home, prepare something for woodcraft folk, order the tents, whatever, oh, I'll cook a bit for Greenham and as well, you know, dah, dah, dah, and you just do it, but, and we didn't use ready meals and takeaway, Angel Delight was the most ready meal we made, wasn't it! Our children had....

Vast quantities!

Exactly, and you did all that, but I just remember it being so much bloody fun.

And a lot of it was dependent on those support networks, wasn't it?

Oh, yeah, absolutely.

And I think that one of the important things for me is that it proves that you can do things and that you can - there will be, or there was someone there to do that support.

Yeah. Yeah.

It definitely was about taking back a control over a situation that we just, to all intents and purposes, felt like we had no control over.

You develop so many skills along the way don't you?

Yes.

I'd never organised events, and rung up people, and found out if somebody would come and speak and all that. You know, you just got on with it and found out how to do it.

Yeah. Yeah.

You hired halls, and you made sure there were enough chairs, and you know, you learned all of that along the way. You just had to get on and do it.

Yes, it's true.

Yeah. So it is important that that story's heard for sure. Yeah. I don't know how easy it is today, well you know, to put children in the experience that they can have that amount of freedom and whatever.

Safety...

The campfires and sleeping in tents that leaked, and all the rest of it. Good for them!

Well, I agree.

(Edit in recording).

I feel it's quite interesting how each gate was different, but somehow we can't really get to that point.

Perhaps it wasn't?

We are beginning to think perhaps it wasn't?

Yeah. June was saying that there seemed to be this notion that every gate was different and I don't know that there were you know, I mean, I know that Red Gate was different from Yellow Gate - Yellow Gate was of its own.

I know Violet Gate was supposed to be very creative.

Yeah.

I was a bit like 'Oh, maybe I should go and see what's happening at Violet Gate.'

Artistically, you mean?

Yeah, yeah. It was probably a myth though. But who knows? I mean, I don't think that many gates existed for that much time anyway.

They weren't all there all the time?

No.

Yellow and Blue seem to be reasonably consistent, have I got that, right? My memory's rubbish! (Laughs).

But when whenever we rocked up at Red, there was nobody else there. We'd take it over for however long, and then it would be abandoned again. That was the sense you've got, wasn't it?

Yeah.

It was yellow that was the focus.

Well, that's where the media would all go. And I think that's partly why we didn't want to be there. We wanted to go and do what we felt was right for our protest at Greenham, but I don't think any of us really wanted to be caught up in all that stuff with all the press and lots of police attention. We were quite happy with our own little squaddies! (Laughs).

I did go back and sit at Red Gate for a whole day.

Oh did you?

I went and sat at Red Gate with my portable chair and Heidi and I dug up a fern.

Did you dig a shit pit?

I didn't dig a shit pit, no! I managed without one for just a day!

(Laughs)

The first thing we had to do wasn't it?

I noticed there's a shovel leaning against a tree!

Did you have to take your own shovel?

Oh yeah, very important!

Who's bringing shovels?

**There'd be no point turning up if we didn't have enough shovels!
(Laughs). I can't remember if we actually discussed what we were ever
taking, but we always seemed to have enough.**

I don't remember a lot of planning going on.

No. I don't think there was much.

Don't remember a lot of planning.

Oh, well.

**It all worked out all right. I don't remember checking whether we had a
first aid kit.**

No, no.

**I think we probably just did what we probably still do now, which is to
take everything, just in case! (Laughs). So you've probably heard more**

from women, then June? Oh, sorry have to cut that bit out! Yes, I, I just have such I have such a lovely warm memories of Greenham.

You feel warm when you remember it?

I think it's because I remember in particular, listening to my sister and how utterly depressed, and how terrified she was of what was going on. And she became fantastically religious as well at the same time, which was really tedious. And I remember thinking, gosh, If only you could see if you just took some action, you'd feel like you're getting back control over the situation. You'd feel like you were doing something to make a difference. Could never understand how she'd got to that stage of just not talking. Maybe she just didn't have enough supportive women around her?

Yeah.

Still, I think we were very lucky in that we came with some pretty bolshy sets of values anyway, but that we gravitated towards each other and because when did I meet you Sheila? Obviously it was as a result of meeting Barbs. I met you in '78, didn't I? So when did you come to come to Wycombe?

Christopher was coming up to 3, so about '82.

Right. I thought it must have been in the early '80s. So Barbara and I met because of women's politics.

Multicultural center under the...

Oh, yes.

I don't know what we were been doing there.

It was because the national abortion campaign had run out of all - what was that funny old pub? You know when you come out of High

Wycombe station and just down the hill on the left hand side. I think it's gone now but it was this funny old pub. We used to meet in there upstairs. And out of that, I think most of the women who were there found it really tricky that a lot of men had turned up to these meetings were really quite weird. (Laughs). Well, you know, and there was generally a sort of gradual sort of shuffling together of the women. 'What do you think about we go and meet on our own?' So we started meeting in the Multi Racial Centre down under the flyover.

Yeah. And when you first came to Wycombe, I think it was you became involved in the Peace Council first, Wycombe Peace Council first.

Yeah. Because of the Action Aid couple. Yeah, names escape me.

We went on to do Women's Aid, because, we thought we'd set up a women's centre in Wycombe.

Yes. Well, we said, Right, well, obviously what we need is a women's centre and we'll have a library and you know, and women can come and just have that space themselves. And of course, the only women that ever turned up are the ones fleeing home and violence. So then we thought, ah,...

We'd better listen to what's actually needed.

Was there a lot of that at Greenham - fleeing violence?

I wasn't really aware of that.

I heard of one or two people, but I don't think it was a great driver for most people there. I think most people were there because they couldn't bear the thought of those nuclear weapons trundling around our soil. Yeah. And then I think it was it was a natural thing really wasn't it, to just be involved in anything that you felt demanded some action. I got very involved in Oxfam as well.

Oh yeah, I was too, and that was because - oh no it was much later. The guy who was in - Bob.

(Laughs). Yeah.

We never been involved in so many things. We've never lived close to each other, have we Sheila? But then when you came to Wycombe and you kind of went often, then we discovered that they all meshed in together and it was just a happy coincidence.

Yeah.

So the overriding thing really is women's community needs protest, do you think?

For us I think it was very important, because I think it was part of our growing up wasn't it? Developing into the people we became. It was so formative. Just made you realise you could do anything if you really wanted to. Just had to get on and do it. As you say, you never booked a hall before, or done any of those things, but you just did it because it needed doing. You suddenly found it all so empowering. It was a funny time, wasn't it? I mean, to a certain extent, you know, the late '70s was still quite a conventional time...

Traditional. Yeah.

Yeah. For a lot of women.

In spite of the rebellion of the '60s?

You see, I think even the women's liberation movement starting in America didn't really start til the late '60s and it didn't honestly hit our shores till the early '70s. It certainly didn't hit High Wycombe work until about 1975! (Laughs).

And the 60s was about general freedom, really - not women's freedom?

It wasn't about women's free. In fact, if anything, I think that was one of the things that came out of that, the meetings that I first went to with the National Abortion Campaign and some of the men that turned up there, and just almost like just pushed women out of the way to talk. It was like hello? Have you even - whose experience is this? I was just astonished. I thought you know what? I think we need our own space. And it felt like quite a big thing to say. It felt almost like, ooh, am I allowed to say this sort of thing? Like, we don't actually want you here! (Laughs). We actually. want to find ways of expressing ourselves without you here...

Without your permission?

Yeah.

And and we don't we don't want to have to adopt, you know, vote for a chair and a secretary and all the rest of it that goes with it. We actually just want to talk about it, and see where we end up. Yeah, so the female perspective was critical for me.

Can we have just one final comment on Greenham from each of you?

Gosh, trying to think of something I haven't said.

Yeah.

I mean, well, this is it really.

We've talked ourselves into the ground!

Yes! (Laughs).

It sounds very frivolous but I just remember it, it would be freedom, because it was being outside, it was time that was special to be with the women I wanted to be with. And often Amy was with us, and I was

learning to be a mum, and all that kind, and freedom - as you were saying earlier - to say whatever you wanted to say, because if somebody wanted to challenge it, that was okay. Because that might made you think about it a different way, or not.

Yes, yeah.

And it unlocked doors. So that would probably be what it was for me.

There's something about a women only space - didn't have to be Greenham necessarily, Greenham helped me to appreciate that women only space is very precious. Very precious.

And maybe, this sounds equally frivolous, but it's the first time I'd learned about the idea that an awful lot of women were persecuted as witches, and taking back that name and saying 'We're the witches of Greenham' made you feel so much more powerful than I'd felt before. And remembering people just going 'Oh that's the most dreadful thing to say. Witches are Satanists.' Are they really? Or is it just when women take up an opposing point of view, or simply challenge the norm, i.e. good women trying to take care of other women, seen as a threat by the emerging doctors of the years - got burned as witches? That's actually a good thing to say. We're reclaiming all of that. So yeah.

Well done. Well thank you ladies, this has been lovely to talk to you all.

You're most welcome.

I've really enjoyed it.