

Voz Faragher

So, as I said, we're, you know, recording the experiences of women, um, and their time at Greenham. So when did you first go?

I have no idea what year it was, 'cause it was such a long time ago. Um. But I think it was in the '80s, early '80s, because I'd got a young baby at the time.

Okay.

So that's how I measure the time.

Time in motherhood terms?

Yes.

Boy, or girl?

Boy, boy. Yeah, I'd got two boys. I'd got a boy who was probably about 4 or 5 and then a baby who was 1 or 2 - but young.

Very young.

Yeah.

Were you living in Cornwall then?

No, I was living in Stoke on Trent.

Oh, okay.

Newcastle under Lyme.

Yes.

Yeah. Yeah.

I know the Midlands vaguely, my husband's from Tamworth.

Oh right.

And mother in law's from Birmingham, so.

Yeah, yeah.

But quite a distance?

Yes, we moved down to Cornwall in the 1990s. So, but before that I - we lived a short time in Leicester. But before that I was um, local to Stoke.

Right. So what prompted you to go to Greenham?

Um. Well, I belonged to a women's group, belonged to a women's group during the '70s. And we'd been active doing various things. We'd done theatre group, street band, pregnancy testing, discussion groups, the sorts of things that women's group did. Um. And I think we all became aware of what was going on at Greenham. And er, for myself, personally, I felt quite as strong - I suppose people of my generation, we'd gone through the Cuba crisis. And this felt like another monumental crisis that this was happening at Greenham. And that we were a US army base. You know, that that just seemed absurd to me. But I also felt fearful of it, and felt that we had to do what we could nonviolent direct action, what we could, to challenge that and perhaps to change people's views on whether that was right or not.

So that was discussed amongst you in the groups themselves, the women's groups, or as friends?

I think there was just a tacit understanding between us that was why we, you know, we wanted to go down there. And we, we were a Greenham support group. And so we would do things locally, in our own community to raise awareness and funding, nonviolent direct action locally, but we also went down to Greenham a couple of times. And once I went down by myself.

Okay, so you acted as a support, almost like a peripheral...

A little satellite.

Yes, yes.

Yes. That was our name Greenham support group.

Right. Okay.

We did singing as well - you know, Carry Greenham Home and all that, we'd be singing songs to Mother Earth.

Okay, so the Greenham support group, um, that was some sometime in the early '80s?

Yes, I think, yeah, I think it was. Yeah.

And so how did the group express its support?

Well, one of the things we did um, was to spray paint a um, it was like an electricity substation on the side of the motorway, the M5, just as you're coming into Trenton, going past Trenton. And we went at the dead of night and spray painted this, and um, we'd got - by chance we got arrested because a police car was passing (laughs). And um, we got arrested and charged, spent the night in jail.

Right.

And um, went to court. And were, what's the word when the charge becomes - committed? It was agreed that we had committed criminal damage, and we were fined for that?

You were fined. How much?

I've no idea, because the group paid it.

How many of you were there?

Um, I reckon there must have been six or seven of us.

Okay.

I think. Yeah, again mists of time.

And what did you spray on the substation?

I don't know. I can't recall, because we didn't take a photograph. But it would be support Greenham women or something like that, you know something simple, but saying who we were really. Yeah.

Did they remove it, or did they leave it there?

**I think they must have removed it. It's not there now, I know that!
(Laughs). Yeah.**

So you spent the night in the local...

In Newcastle jail. Yeah, we were interviewed. And um, we'd all agreed to say 'No comment', or to, so we did that and in the end they just put us into the jail for the night and then released us in the morning.

What were their attitudes to you?

Um, not bad really, I don't think - there was no sort of bullying or aggression or any anything like that. I think they were probably more puzzled than anything. And er, when we went to court, the police officers - there were probably two police officers in the car. Um. And I don't even think they were going along the motorway. I think they were going along a little side road that we were parked on. And um, they, they said in court, something like that we'd er, we'd made a certain noise with the can. And I said 'Could it have been somebody just kicked the can?' And they said 'Yeah', and then I felt oh, afterwards I regretted that, because I've actually wrong-footed him unnecessarily. You know. They were actually they, you know, they weren't unpleasant, or nasty to us or anything, so they were fine.

Okay.

Which hasn't always been my experience at protests. But, you know, on this occasion it was.

So what other actions they take at that point?

Well, mostly it was about going down to Greenham. And so we went down to cut the fence - remember there was the big protest. So we had planning meetings about cutting the fence. And um, I remember that we, we called the bolt cutters 'knitting needles'. And um, think we went down in individual cars, and we had a plan of staying together, having a certain portion of the fence, cutting it with the bolt cutters. I don't think we did the sort of things - sort of trying to pull it down or anything, I think we, we sort of restricted ourselves to try and cut pieces out. And then a few of us were arrested by the police during that, that protest. And er, I found that, that was quite difficult, really, that when we, when we were cutting the fence and, you know, singing and protesting and making a noise and everything, there were helicopters flying overhead, and it felt um, really quite frightening. It felt like um, I can only think of the word armageddon, but that's too strong a word to use, but it really didn't feel good at all, you know, and the fence in front of us came down and somebody came, um, a police officer came, I think it was a police officer

came and grabbed me, and handcuffed me, and dragged me over the barbed wire. So I cut myself.

Gosh.

And um, I can remember saying 'Oh, it hurts, it hurts.' The handcuff really hurt me. And er, that was most of - and it did make me cry because it was so horrible. And then we, we were taken to certain building inside the base, where we were all kept. And then I think we were all just released. We weren't charged or anything. We were just released after that. Yeah.

But you did experience some physicality from them, as you said it...you were handcuffed?

Yes. That was unpleasant.

It sounds unpleasant. Yes.

Yes. It was not nice. And I, fairly sure that I was on the television being arrested, you know, taken over the fence, and that day, but I've never - I've seen it once, but I've never seen it since, and I don't know where, where that would be - somewhere!

In the archives.

Yeah, in the archives.

Because that's the sort of thing that often gets uploaded to YouTube. So it's worth...

It would nowadays, wouldn't it?

Yeah, it would have been kept as a record.

Yeah.

And again, I think that's, you know, the importance of a project like this, because these days, things are much more um, easy to record for posterity.

Yes. Yes.

So how many times roughly did you go down to Greenham?

So we went down that time, we went down another time and we stayed over night in a bender. And er, it's quite astonishing because I got quite a heavy cold. And we stayed the night in this bender, on the fresh air on the straw and everything, and it had gone the next day, and I thought, ah that's Greenham air for you. But I think probably just being outside did it. But I don't think we did anything much, we just sort of talked to other women and, you know, hung around and it wasn't um, an action. It was more - we probably took stuff down with us I would imagine as well. Yeah.

Which gate did you stay?

No idea.

Okay.

No, don't know.

So it sounds as if it was um, apart from the run in with the police, it sounds very much as if it was about a gathering of women?

Yes, I think it was about sisterhood and solidarity, really. But also because we were a long way from Greenham, and we weren't living there, none of us were living there. So it was about trying to play just a small part in what was happening, what was being done to challenge Greenham, the airbase. Yeah.

So did you meet women from lots of different parts of the country? Or did you tend to stay with your own groups?

Um, I can't remember the answer to that. I think we would have met the people who would just round us, you know, rather than sort of trying to meet everybody. Yeah.

Yes.

And it might have been that some of the women in the, in the support group had connections as well too, with other people. And another time I went down by myself, and um, I think I felt um, really strongly drawn to do it, because I felt that we were all at such risk, really, that we, even though it felt to me, quite a dangerous thing to be doing, I hadn't long since passed my driving. (Laughs). So I was driving on the motorway for the very first time, and get, finding my way down there, and getting there. And um, it, it was a bit of an extreme thing to do, but at the same time I felt that I really had to do that. And um, I got down there and there was a group of women sitting, I think in a kind of woodland place, and I recognised one of them from Stoke. So together, we um, paired up and we decided to break into the base. So we, we decided to walk around the fence, and see if there was any weak point that we could get in through. And what we found was a hole going under the fence (laughs).

Someone had tunnelled.

They'd already done it! (Laughs). So we got in, and immediately we were really worried about the dogs, you know there were dogs loose. You know, we were quite worried about that. So we just basically wandered around until we, we were caught, you know. And again, my memory is not so good about what happened when we were caught, but we were taken somewhere, processed and let go. Because it was happening all the time.

It was a regular thing for them?

Yeah.

Yes. So, and you were in your 20s then?

I was in my 30s.

Were you?

Yes, yes. Yeah. So we then drove back to Stoke together, through the night, just drove all the way, and I can remember her name was Hillary. And I can remember she just talked all night to keep me awake. (Laughs). I would never dream of doing that now, but that's what we wanted to do. I think we just wanted to get home.

Yeah, so it sounds almost as if the drive to the base and back was as big as being at....

(Laughs). It was!

...as being at the base?

Yeah, that's true.

But it did give you incentive and motivation to, to, to act.

Yes.

And take risks.

Yeah, I felt we had to take risks. Because the you know, if we didn't take risks, and we did nothing, then the consequences could be really terrible for everybody. You know, it's a bit um, like Extinction Rebellion, now. People are feeling they have to act, because something terrible is facing us all.

Yes.

And I suppose that's the root of nonviolent direct action, that you feel you have to you have to speak out, and and take action. And er, that's what what drove us, really. Yeah.

So, so you had two children at the time you went to Greenham?

Yes, yes.

So, you have support from your partner - the children's father to go as well?

Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

So, that's two boys and your husband?

Yes.

How did you feel perhaps when it became women only, no men?

Well, it - all my women's group activists had always been women only, no men. So you know, he's, he looked after the kids if I went off to Greenham, that wasn't a problem, really.

Right. Because Greenham started off, um allowing men, and then they turned around and said 'No men', and as the time went on, some interviewees have argued that there was quite a hostile element towards men. Did you come across that at all?

No, I didn't. Um, I suppose the women's group I was in, there was some - there was a whole range of radical feminists, feminists, you know, to people with more, um, I won't say extreme views, that's the wrong, wrong word altogether. But there was a spectrum of perspectives on feminism. And, um, so some women would choose not to have men in their lives, and other other women did have men in their lives, but I

never felt there was, you know, there wasn't any sort of hostile - overt hostility towards, towards men, and they were often looking after our kids when we were... Because I suppose in those days, most of us were in our 30s and had young children - that was the makeup I suppose of a lot of us, but not not everyone. Not everyone, yeah. So that wasn't a big issue.

Right, okay. Did you keep in touch with any of the people from those days?

Um, I still know one or two people yes, that we've continued to be friends, you know, from those days. Um, the women's group itself I left in um, it would be about '88 - I left Stoke and er, I suppose the women's, the women's group in various forms, the women's movement has carried on despite the sort of rhetoric of post-feminism and all of that, and, and still goes strong, I think so, er that carries on, but it's only through individual friendship, really, that I'm in touch with people. But I also know a close friend from Cornwall who lived at Greenham, as well. So Greenham women are everywhere! (Laughs).

Yes. A good name for the project.

Yes!

So, do, is that somebody that you met during those years, or met in Cornwall?

No, I've met since we moved to Cornwall.

And found that you've got that in common?

Yes, and we're similar ages, and we've got actually...in common. Yeah.

Right. Yes. Yes. So it's something that's sort of stayed present, even though it was...

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Your phone! (Laughs).

Yeah.

So how many times did you go roughly to the, to the base itself?

I think that makes it three.

Three, so the ones by yourself...

Yes, once with the women, and once for the protest, yes.

Did you find that those experiences that you had at the base then fed back into your women's group? Or did they feel separate?

Um. I think it fed back in, because it's such a sort of monumental experience, really, especially the protests, cutting the fence, was such a monumental experience, that I think er, it would feed back into, into our consciousness, I suppose as much as anything.

Yes.

And although it was terrifying, it was also quite empowering in a way. Because we were, we were taking our fear and we were putting it into direct action.

Channelling it?

Yes. Yeah.

In a way that was useful.

Yeah, that we felt was positive. And, er, we'd sort of made a stand, I suppose.

I mean was fear about the cruise missiles themselves and the potential for them to be used, or for your own safety taking action, or both?

I think both. Yes, because the you know, the very strong fear of the cruise missiles was - obviously drove us, and just how wrong that was, it wasn't just that they were scary, but just how wrong that is that this should should happen in our world. But then also going down to take, I think, whenever you take part in direct, nonviolent direct action you always will - I do anyway - are quite fearful of the consequences for your own personal safety. You don't want to be hurt. And you know that it's possible that you will be hurt. So I think it's both really yeah.

Yes. And I guess also, I mean, having a criminal record.

Yeah.

'Cause stays with you for a long time...

Forever, forever - potentially, depending what job you apply for.

Forever. Yes, yes. So it's, it has long term consequences.

Yes.

I mean did it have long term consequences for you?

It didn't prevent me getting any jobs, but um especially in the early days, I was declared.

You did?

Yes. And I explained it was in connection with the Greenham action. But yeah, it was there. And it still is there - if they want to look now they will find it. Yeah.

Yes.

So if it's...

But it's not been relevant to many jobs, you know, I've worked for the local authority. So you know, they will do intensive checks. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

So you are sort of putting yourself on the line making that decision to go?

Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

And is taking something that's been a lifetime choice for you? Have you been involved in other protests? Or was there something about one made it special?

We've been on CND marches in earlier, earlier days.

They were before Greenham weren't they?

Yeah. And er, I can't think of anything, anything else but - oh, I know we we squatted a refuge. It was an empty children's home, we squatted it in order to turn it into a refuge. That's - that was a pretty big action that we took as a women's group together. And er, marches, protests, that kind of thing. Um, I think we might, I think I might have been to one of the Snowball events up in the Midlands as well.

What's a Snowball event?

They were, they were things like at Warrington airbase, where, um, again, it would be about protesting and singing songs. We also did something locally called Against the Grain, when there was the famine and LiveAid. And we'd do things like dress in white and lie down dead on the pavement in Newcastle, things like that. And then we went to the nearest airbase, um grain store to us, I can't remember its name, and

sang songs, and sort of put ribbons through fence, and flowers and things. Yeah. So yes, just stuff like that really.

So really from the '60s?

Yes.

And it sounds as if you were, had an awareness from your work or your involvement with the CND movement. And then this particular um, decision by is it Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, to base these missiles, that sounds as if that really did stimulate you to act?

Yes. I think that came into my consciousness with the women's group, really. Um. And I think that it's, it was very much a collective, collective thing, that we got involved in that. Yeah.

So it was a way to, because I guess the women's group did a variety of things. And it was one area that it channeled its energies into?

Yes. Yes. I think it was almost like a sort of subgroup.

Mm hmm.

Yeah.

Yes. Yes. So that was sort of like a hub in Stoke?

Yes.

So you've got the hub up in Stoke on Trent and then this small group then went off to Greenham. But then you went alone.

Yes.

So it was, it really did have an individual impact for you to decide it was important enough to go by yourself?

Yes, exactly. Yeah. Yeah, and I've no idea why we didn't all go. But maybe that just wasn't possible at that particular time.

But given that, you know, you'd only just passed your test as well and decided to go down to Greenham from from Stoke on Trent and take the motorways and um...

Yeah, yes.

I can imagine it was, could be quite scary.

I remember I was coming into Birmingham, coming down from Stafford into Birmingham. And to get onto the road, must be to London, I suppose - Newbury - you have to just take take a sort of left hand turn. And I think I was probably dithering because I didn't know what I was doing, and there was a lorry behind me, and he obviously got exasperated with me and forced me onto the hard shoulder. (Laughs).

Gosh!

So er. Yeah. It was an adventure.

Yes.

Yeah.

Is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to add?

Um. No. Other than that, you know, like many other women who were involved, we've we've continued our sort of, um, I suppose our life paths really, within women's - the women's movement, er and feminist movement. And er, that's remained a really important - it's not just a strand, it's a whole identity isn't it, that you know, and, and those, those

experiences even though they're so long ago now, they're, they're really significant, you know, that that we did that, and um, that you stand up for what's right, really. I think that's been important in all the sort of women's group work that I've been involved in. Yeah.

And do you think if the decision was made again, to place American missiles on UK bases, do you think women would react in the same way, or do you think the response would be different?

I don't know that nowadays it would be just women.

Okay. Um hum.

I think that there was a specific, it was a specific time in history, that point, but I'm not sure if it would be just women. And whether it would become more of a - an action that involved everybody that disagreed with it, and um, and involve a whole diversity of people. Again, bit like Extinction Rebellion, that wants to be as inclusive as possible. I think that might be the case. But I do also like to think that women would be able to er, get together and do something...

To unite?

To unite. Yes. (Laughs).

Thanks Voz, that's great.

You're welcome. Thank you. It's bad that the memory's so hazy, isn't it? Oh now, there was Jude, there was Hillary, who else was there? Who else was there? It's difficult because it is such a long time ago, now. Yeah.