

Tamsin Clayton

So, how did you get involved in the peace movement in the first place? When, when did that happen?

Um, I was about 23 or 24. And, I had just really started to move on a political lesbian scene. And, the big demo had just happened - the million women, and they put a call out that they were desperate for women to go to Greenham. At that time, they were getting evicted all the time and women were leaving in droves.

When was that, in the...

'84, I think. So, it may have been '83. But it was '83/'84. And I took my daughter and went, and it's quite funny because when I before I went, I ironed all my clothes packed them all nicely. And I remember getting there and there were people there that had children that didn't have matching pyjamas, and I was shocked. Yeah. Um, a few years later, I was a completely different person. So it was a, yes, it was a real - it was wonderful, actually, it was wonderful. But yeah, I don't think I went to save the world, I went to save myself.

Right.

And I've said to a lot of people, actually, I think anyone was there had real need, and they looked at me as though there's something wrong with me. But I do think that, I think that saving the world was a byproduct. I think we were there to save ourselves. And to be a young emerging lesbian in the early '80s - to go from that isolation, to find your people was truly incredible.

And, and was that based on the gates that you - because different gates have different sort of...

Yes. So my, my concept at the time - not wanting to offend anyone, was Yellow Gate was full of mad people, and Blue Gate was full of working class dykes, which is where my sort of spiritual home was. Um, but I had a child, and it wasn't suitable to have a child there. So we reestablished Red Gate. I think Red Gate was there originally, but it wasn't there when I was there. So we reestablished Red Gate, because it was suitable for children and, and it was, and then women who wanted to be involved in childcare could come there as well. But I must say I did hang out quite a lot at Blue Gate, and I loved the Rockeby, which was the pub. Needless to say, I don't drink at all now. Um, I did all my drinking in my youth. And Green Gate was for the airy-fairy people. Yeah, so that was my understanding of it. And I did know people, and Orange Gate, I knew Orange Gate as well. So I knew people from all the gates, but mainly Red Gate.

So, so was it what you expected when you arrived?

I had no idea what to expect. I had absolutely no idea what to expect. I mean, it was completely outside of my experience. Yeah, at that time, I'd only just discovered political - politics, actually, politics full stop. Actually, I had, I suppose been, but no I wasn't, I wasn't aware. I remember going to a lesbian mother's conference. That must have been about '83 or again '84. It was in Brighton and somebody had organised it. And I remember being on the train traveling up there, and lots of people had all got the same train up. And I was talking to this woman. And I said to her 'Oh, oh, I don't know what class I am.' And she said 'Oh my god, you're working class. Yes.' And I thought, oh, right, okay. And I'd never even considered my class. So I really wasn't that - I wasn't very self aware, actually, at all, I don't think, at that stage. Because I had a very fragmented childhood, I was in and out of care a lot. And I didn't really have any sense of self to speak of. I got a lot of my sense of self at Greenham.

What, what do you mean sense of self? What does that mean? Sort of belonging type thing? Or?

Um, well, I think I always had to be what people wanted, and I constantly moved - I went to 11 schools. So I constantly moved, and every time - and then I'd go back to my mother, and then I'd go back into care and go back to my mother, and then I'd go back into care - usually only probably with my mother for a few months. So everyone has different rules and standards, and what was acceptable in one house wasn't in another. Um, and my mother did actually think she was the queen. And er, she, her parents aspired to be um, upper middle class, and she had all these really middle class values, like we all spoke beautifully. We all ate beautifully, we knew how to lay a table properly. It was as though when we were living with mother we were waiting to, you know, like princesses waiting to be discovered. It was almost like that. So, and then I'd go into care, and either be with normal working class people with - without double standards (laughs), or really quite posh people. Sort of, so I learned to fit in to what was expected. But within that I lost myself. So I didn't have a very good idea about who I was. And then of course, being a lesbian as well, sort of messed that up a bit more. So, yeah, it was, it was a wonderful time for me.

And who were you when you discovered who you were? What, what were the things about yourself that you that you discovered?

(Sighs). What did I discover? I don't know. (Laughs).

I think I think one of the things that struck me talking to other women is how, um, how, how the women only set up, allowed them to express themselves in a much more confident way.

Yes. Yeah.

So, so they weren't, they weren't asking permission of anybody or, so, so and I think that's unusual now, let alone in the '80s.

Amazing, but I think actually, we were all really, really messed up, and really, really searching for - looking for ourselves and, and that we did have a safe environment and we, you know, we had - we believed some

really strange stuff you know, we believed all women were wonderful and you know, it was like quite naive and unrealistic in lots of ways. But it was so healing, so, so very healing as well.

Yeah, I think it's interesting that that you don't use the word feminist, because it's - you think that all women would be quite strongly feminist, maybe it was different camps that were feminist?

Well we were strongly feminist, we were really, really strongly feminist, um, um, almost to a separatist point. Um, but I don't think that the politics that I had then are not necessarily the politics I have that I have now, although I'd still consider myself to be a feminist, quite a strong feminist. Um, but I think I had a lot of anger towards men, er, quite rightly. And I think that I had never been allowed to talk, you know, talk about the abuse you suffered as a child - we weren't allowed to talk, those things are secret, and then suddenly, you're in an environment where everybody's talking about it. And in actual fact, I don't think I even came to terms with my abuse 'til I was quite a lot older. Yeah, I think it's a trickle down effect. And um...

Yeah, well talking therapies.

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

You know, these days, people understand, but in those days.

No, no, we didn't have a counsellor, well, there might have been, but working class people didn't get it. So...

And I think it was quite stigmatising as well. I think people thought ooh, counselling, the matter with you sort of thing. Whereas actually, you're having human responses and you need some help to walk through them.

Exactly. Yes.

So how old was your daughter, at the time?

She was about 2. She was born in March '82. So um, yes, she was about 2 - she loved it, it was lovely. It was a lovely place to bring up children actually, a) because there were lots of people that were involved, so - or women that were involved, so that we, there was always somebody there. And there were other children at the gate. Um, so she had people to play with and um, yeah, it was just very nice, I think.

So what was a sort of typical day in terms of how you...

Oh, well, some days we'd be evicted four times. So it was not like it was in the early days, when people were established. So literally everything that you had had to be - you had to be able to wheel it away. And we had a pram that we put loads of stuff on. So we would literally build a bender at bedtime, and all sleep in one big bender. Occasionally people would come and visit and build their own bender, or bring a tent or whatever, but generally, we all slept in one big bender, because it was just easier to pack up and move.

Yeah.

So you know, we did things like we dug shit pits and um, got water and er, yeah, I mean sat around the fire, and we used to have - the men from Bristol came with wood, I think that was on a Thursday. And er, Irish Mary and her husband Fred, I think he was called, used to come on a Tuesday or something and bring us - people used to come and bring us food, you know. So and there was, I mean, they're the only regulars that I really remember. But they were really yeah, they were lovely people. So that sort of did, and on a Saturday night we went up the Rockeby, every now and again we'd all be banned, but then they'd let us back again because they needed the money.

So was that in Newbury?

Yeah in Newbury. Yeah, it was like walking distance from, from the camp. Although if you were lucky you got a lift, because nobody actually wanted to walk. So and yeah, I mean, it was all really about survival. It was about cooking, and shopping. I mean, obviously people had to go to the shops. That in itself could be quite traumatic, because people were very, very horrible. I can remember once being in the laundrette, washing and drying our clothes, and you know, this guy threatening to smash our faces in, and calling us filthy, and spitting on us, and you know. So going into town shopping was quite traumatic. But we get we did it. It wasn't that bad. So...

And why do you think they had such an extreme reaction?

Well, I think obviously the media had a big part to play in it. And um, I suppose by and large, having an American airbase in your town meant that it boosted the economy. And it's a very like quite a Tory area, Thatcher was on the throne. So you know the...

Optimised a lot of things that they didn't...

Yeah.

...didn't like.

Yes, exactly. So we were you know, like, Daily Mail readers' nightmare, so yeah, of-course they didn't like us.

And what did you think of the way that the media covered it? How, how was that?

I quite liked it.

Did you?

Yeah, I quite liked the idea of being an outcast from society, and an anarchist and all those things. And er, it sort of gave me a reason to be

me really, it meant that, you know, I was young and I was angry, and I was messed up. And I think a lot of us were, and, and it was great. Yeah, it's wonderful. We were like 'Yay!'. We used to go into London and go on all the marches, smash the police bill and stop the clause, and all the sort of demos, and the gay prides and, I mean, it was, it was wonderful. And those are the things that I wouldn't have done on my own, and because I lived in Plymouth, at the time, I didn't live in London, I lived in Plymouth. So, you know, it's another planet Plymouth to London, and, and all that was going on politically there was like, wow, compared to Plymouth. So, yeah.

So when you arrived with your daughter which, which, which gate did you did you start off in?

Yellow, obviously.

Right. Okay.

Everyone started at Yellow, I'm sure.

Did they?

Well in my experience, people who didn't really know anything about the Greenham...

I guess it's like the front door, isn't it?

Yeah, yeah. They sort of rocked up at Yellow. And, um, and you know, even though there wasn't a hierarchy, there was a hierarchy. Yeah. And um, you sort of soon learnt - you soon found your place if you like, within that hierarchy, and I definitely was drawn to Blue Gate and, you know, thought Yellow Gate, were all mad, and Green Gate were all mad, but in a different way.

So what was the Yellow Gate madness?

Um, they were very hard. They were very hardcore. And there was this woman who - I imagine probably had paranoid schizophrenia, who was living there at the time. And she was very mad. And um, every now and again, she'd get sectioned, and they'd go and get her out, and bring her back and things. And, and you know, I use the word - when I'm talking about mad, I mean, that might sound dreadful. And I realise it isn't probably the language I should be using. But it was my experience at the time and...

And quite scary having a child?

It was really scary. I was really frightened of Yellow Gate women, and their like really sort of radical ways if you like, because they were very, very radical. And for me, a young novice from Plymouth, it was scary stuff. But then of course, when I went to, when I went round to Blue Gate, I was scared. I was scared of everybody actually thinking about it. They were scary as well, because there was a lot of like dykes there from Glasgow and Northern Ireland and places, you know, they had these really hard accents. And I was quite scared, but they were the women that I loved. Yeah, they were like, they were who I wanted to be. Um, which now looking back tells me a lot about who I was, because clearly I was probably more like them, because they were very angry and sort of er, yeah. So, but I knew that I had kids and I couldn't be in that environment, and I needed to create a safer environment.

So that's quite a big deal - creating a another, you know, setting up another - or it sounds like it's a big deal, setting up another gate?

Well, not really, because - how did it come about? I think my cousin was started to come and visit me, um, so we had only met when she was an adult. She was, she's a couple of years older than me. But then when she came to Greenham, and I was there, she started to visit me. And she was bringing her kids as well.

And what did her husband think of that?

Well, he didn't like it much at all. But I mean, realistically, their marriage was already over. And it was through Greenham, that she found out that she could get benefits, that she didn't actually have to stay in a marriage that she was dreadfully unhappy in. She didn't realise that...

She was entitled to benefits in her own right?

Yes, yeah. And she didn't know that. So she'd sort of stayed in a marriage that she wasn't happy in for a long time, because she didn't realise that she could escape. So she then went on and escaped. So I imagine we sort of wanted somewhere for the kids to play safely. And so we said 'Oh, let's go and reopen Red Gate.' And er, that's what we did. So yeah, and actually, um, recently, she went and met another woman that was at Red Gate with us, who's living on Dartmoor now. And she's coming up to stay in a couple of months.

Oh lovely.

So I'll get to see her, I haven't seen her for millions of years. So there's, um, a few people that seem to be, they seem to be coming out of the woodwork, because it seems to be years and years and years that I hadn't seen anybody that was at Greenham, and then slowly - maybe all this stuff is sort of unearthing them. Because I know people who've been at Greenham, or women that have been at Greenham, but nobody that I knew when I was there, other than my cousin who obviously I knew, because we're related. But yeah, so, I think...

Yeah, maybe it's the 100 years of the Suffragettes as well, I think - because it was, it was that, and the fact that Helen John, who was one of the original women who er started Greenham, she died. And so the two women who were running this project, putting the bid to the Heritage Lottery and said 'You know, if, if we don't do it, you know, why is everybody going crazy for the Suffragettes and nobody cares about Greenham? You know, it's the same revolutionary act, different, obviously.

Yes. Yes, I did have a gun held to my head once, which was pretty terrifying.

Tell me about that Tamsin. You can't just say that and not say anything else!

Well, we used to do I mean, really, we used to do it for fun as much as anything, and to annoy them, but actually I later learned that evidently there was a, evidently a prize for the first person to shoot a Greenham woman in amongst the American Air Force. Um, so, um but, we'd gone into the base one night, because we just used to do it just to show how easy it was to do it. Yeah. And we'd done it a few times not been caught, but this time we were caught. And we were like, running through the base and suddenly we heard all the - saw all the lights and we knew they were coming, and we were like oh my god, there's nowhere to run, because we were in the middle of nowhere. And they pulled up and jumped out of their cars and had their guns over the car doors. And they were like 'Stop, or we'll shoot.' Yeah, now your natural reaction is to run. The last thing you want to do is to stop, and obviously it's the most terrifying thing that you can ever imagine. And I couldn't stop. But, I just walked slowly, because everything in me told me that I had to put distance. And so I just walked slowly, and they ran up and they went wham and kicked my legs out from under me, and I went smash onto the floor. And then they took us to right around the other side, to Yellow Gate, and kept us there and interrogated us. They weren't that interested because I mean, I gave a false name and they weren't that interested in who we really were. They knew that that wasn't my name, and they just kept us there, and then they let us out, and then we had like, miles to walk round back to Red Gate, sort of thing. Um, but it was the most, yeah, having a gun held at you is not fun, and you've got no idea how you're going to react until it actually happens. But believe me when they say 'Stop or I'll shoot', and I see it on telly and I think ummmmm, yes, I understand when people don't stop.

So what was your relationship, because it seems that there were different relationships with Newbury police, than the MOD police, and with the American Air Force, and the bailiffs, so there were, what were your relationships like?

So we didn't really have much, that much to do with the Americans - unless we got caught. Yeah, I mean, we were caught by the Americans, but on the outskirts, we had er squaddies. And generally they were quite nice. I mean, I remember once talking, chatting to one of the squaddies, and he said his sister really wanted to come and be a Greenham woman. And I remember um, giving him a friendship bracelet to give to her. Yeah, so it was, it was a very mixed bag. Other people would just be really rude and offensive, and and the bailiffs, I mean, the bailiffs....oh. They they just used to say 'We're not political, we're just doing our job'. And there was sort of two of them, and we knew them really well. And somebody would come around on a push bike and shout 'Bailiffs are coming', and we'd start packing everything up. And then all we had to do was walk onto the road with this stuff. And then they couldn't touch anything, because we weren't...

Trespassing, or whatever they...

Yeah, yeah.

....decided you were doing.

Yeah. So, I mean, it was all right, really. I mean, they weren't like - some days they had bad days, and they'd be pigs, but most of the time, actually they weren't that bad, really. When I look back on it as an adult. Um, at the time, we thought they were pretty horrendous, but I don't think, when I look back, they were that bad, really. They were just doing their jobs. And you know, I think one of them was nastier than the other. But it could have been good cop bad cop, you know, who knows? So, but every now and again, they would have - like at one time we'd dug a pit and we'd put all our coal boxes in the earth, and covered it with earth and whatever, and kept all our stuff in there. And then we didn't have to

move it. And somehow they found out about it. I often think they had spies in amongst us. And they came and got it, and got all our food and everything. And you know, we used to, like, have a shit pit that we didn't put toilet paper down the shit pit, because we wanted to maintain um, the natural, you know, whatever.

Like a composting toilet?

Yeah, yeah, but it literally was a shit pit. It wasn't a composting toilet. It was a hole that we did shits in and covered it with mud. But we had a bag that we put all our tissue in, and then we took the tissue and disposed of that. So it wasn't in the ground. Um, but yeah, I mean, just becomes part of your day. I mean, when it was raining, it was a pain. Sometimes, you know, it'd be raining and you'd be evicted four times. It really wasn't fun. But that's how it was.

How long did you stay there?

Um, I think I was probably pretty much there, but I mean, we would go off into London, go off and do things, but I was probably pretty much there, full time for about a year. So I would have gone there in the spring, so it would have been about the March and, I probably wasn't there November, December, January, February much, I would have probably gone for a night or two. It was just too cold, and we were being evicted a lot. Then the next, and then the spring again, I would have gone again and done it all again. But I think quite a lot of us sort of moved away from camp and began to create our own communities outside.

What back in London you mean?

Well, in London or wherever, wherever you lived, really because people came from all over the world. And it was all over the world. I mean, you know, I went and stayed in a squat in The Hague. Beautiful, beautiful squat with Greenham women. And I had women come to visit me in Plymouth that I'd met at Greenham - there was a lot of Dutch women

there. Dutch and Spanish and Swedish. Yeah, quite a lot of er, it really opened my world, as well because up until that point, I had pretty much anyone foreign, because it was all very much about foreigners, and foreign food, and foreign ness, and foreign that in those days, and being from Devon it was very white, very white community. So for me to meet people that weren't white was quite a revelation. I was quite scared. Yeah. And I think it's quite good insight to have actually, because when people are so racist, I think a lot of that is actual fear of the unknown. So it's not a bad experience to have had, because I think it can help me bridge gaps. So, obviously, having lived in London for quite a while now it's not afraid anymore. (Laughs). But yeah.

So how did the, because it's, it's famously a, a, a collective but with - as you say, that there was no hierarchy, but there was a hierarchy. How did - was that effective? How were conflicts managed and things like that?

Um, (breathes out) I think people moved gates. (Laughs). So that was one way that conflict was managed. Um, but I think, I can't really remember that much conflict where we were, because people came and went. So, you know, there was quite a lot of people that lived in Bristol, for instance, and they'd come and go, and then we had, you know, then we had the visitors, who came, and people who came for a night or two, and so there was like, a constant stream of people coming in and out, and they brought with them a whole new ambience really. So, if you got - if somebody was getting on your nerves, the chances are that they would bugger off anyway in a few days, or you would go and stay at a Blue Gate for a couple of days, or you'd go back to Plymouth. And we used to hitch, I mean we used to hitch everywhere. So when I think about it now - wooah! So yeah, I mean, there were, there were real problems. I know there were, but not really at our gate. So, but maybe we were um, I don't know, maybe we weren't as hardcore as some of the other gates. I don't know.

Did you deal with, did you have anything to do with the money and the bank accounts?

Oh god, no.

So that can, I think that sometimes could be a source of conflict, couldn't it?

No, no, we didn't have anything to do with any of that. I mean, um, I think the most exciting thing that I happened, when I was there was Bruce Kent came, you know, the CND man - was his name Bruce Kent, or was that Superman's name?

No, no, that's Clark Kent.

(Laughs!) He came...

I'll edit that bit if it's wrong!

He came and brought us all watermelons. He came - I think it was with loads of watermelons, or something like that if I remember. So, and there was always a rumour that Yoko Ono was going to come. And evidently she did. But I never saw her. So, um. Yeah, but no, I wasn't involved in any of that organisational stuff, and I would not wanted to be either. Yeah, so.

So were you arrested? Obviously you were involved in civil disobedience because going onto the camp itself is, you know, is, er is...

Well, yeah, I was arrested for that, but not charged.

Right.

So they'd arrest you and then un-arrest you, and throw you out. So I mean, that happened a few times. Um, but no, because I think they'd realised how pointless it was arresting people. Um, I didn't know people who were arrested and charged. And I did visit people in Holloway as well, but I don't know who. Um, but no, no, I couldn't, I had children. So I had a child. So it was quite important to me that um, I wasn't. So if

there was anything that we were likely to get arrested doing, I would stay at home and cook the dinner, or something. Yeah, we didn't have to be that involved.

Yeah. So there's no point in being a hero if it's going to ruin your child's life

Yeah. Exactly, yes. So...

Does she remember anything about it?

Not really. She looks at photographs and asked why she had that awful haircut, and why I dressed her like a boy. (Laughs). Apart from that, and like 'Don't ever tell anyone', things like that. So, but no, she was quite mortified by the whole experience as an... It's quite funny because you know, both my girls are all like, designer clothes and lipstick. So, um, my son actually is quite alternative. But both my girls are so the opposite of me. So the opposite - everything matches and whatever, so it's quite, quite funny really.

Yeah, it's a, yes, you kind of think that sort of thing inevitably will rub off, but maybe it has been in a slightly different way.

Yeah, I think in a slightly different way. Definitely. So, and actually I can see elements of the girls - of me in both my girls. No, they're both very focused and driven, and they almost certainly get that from me - and bloody minded. But, and whilst they are, you know, my my youngest daughter's 30 and she left school at 13/14 - she refused to go. And I used to take the work with me 'cause I was the boss, so I could. And she left school with no qualifications nothing, made up some qualifications, got a job as a receptionist, and worked her way up to the job she has now. And she's really, really successful. So...

Women are in prison for that now, children truanting.

They threatened to do that to me. And I used to say 'Well, how are you? You know, how am I meant to get her there?' Yeah, so um, it was. Yeah, I mean, I really had to fight and fight and fight, and they threatened me with all sorts of things but they didn't actually do it. Yeah. So that's just how it was.

So, um, how many of you were there Red Gate eventually? If you and your cousin kind of went off and set it up, did it...

There were loads of us.

Did people gravitate towards - people with children gravitate towards you?

Um, I think people who wanted a nice laid back, yeah, um, gate gravitated towards us. So I mean, we were sort of quite working class and I mean, there was loads of us - absolutely loads of us. There was probably about 10 core people, Meryl and Mel and, I can't even remember - Pip I think one of them was - there was lots of us, and people who - we were quite a mellow, yeah, it was, we weren't, Blue Gate was quite hardcore and er, quite hectic.

So nice to visit and then come away from?

Yeah, yeah, but where we were it was, you know we'd all sit around the fire at night telling stories, and playing music, and singing, and sort of being quite, quite gentle but not as airy-fairy as Green Gate. Yeah, (laughs), so it was. Yeah.

So were the songs - because there's a Greenham songbook, and there's probably about, I mean, there must be nearly 50 songs in there. Did you sing those?

Yeah, down at Greenham, on a spree funded by the KGB - um...

I met the woman who wrote that, yesterday!

Oh right, yeah. And yes. I mean, there was loads - so many. In-fact, one day I was on the South Bank in London and I went into the British Film Library, some, somewhere British, some thing on there, that I can't remember what. And there was a group of women singing. And they were singing Greenham songs.

Brilliant.

And it was like, oh, my God, and I said to my friend, we've got to stay. We've got to stay. And I recognise, and, and the woman said 'Um, these were songs we sang...' And I said 'At Greenham!', and she said 'Yes, at Greenham'. And it was like, so there's lots and lots of them. And I quite often think of them when I'm doing things, like oh, wow.

Fantastic. I think those - some of those songs are absolutely brilliant.

Yeah, they are. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Very, still very relevant.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that was, yeah, we did use to all sit around and sing. And yeah, it was, it was fun.

So, would you say that, why, why do you think that the legacy of Greenham hasn't been sort of carried on from, from then to now? Because we've got - one of the volunteers that we've got in our group is a student. She's, I think she's 20. And she said, she never heard of Greenham before she joined. And 70% of some of her friends hadn't either.

When my daughter was about 17, she tried, decided she would go back to school and try and get a qualification. And she didn't stay because she couldn't bear it. But she did try. And one of the things that had to do a project and she said 'Oh, I'm going to do Greenham women'. And her teacher was really, really like 'Don't be so ridiculous. Who do you -

however are you going to find anyone that's been to Greenham?', and she said 'Well, my mother was there.' She said 'Oh, well, I don't think it's a suitable subject.' So that is the sort of thing, and I'm not - but I think I do know people who were taught it at school, but I can't remember who told me that. I don't know. But, uh, well, I mean, 'cause women innit - women's history is ignored by and large. And. And it was, um, yeah, we weren't nice. We weren't nice girls, were we. I think probably, because there was a lot of lesbianism involved, I think that made a big difference. If we'd been um - if it had been a middle class, straight women's movement, I'm sure more would have probably come of it, because even the Suffragettes tended to be posh birds, didn't they? Excuse me. So I don't know - who's to say?

And what do you think could be the learning for these, for future generations from Greenham, what do you what do you think girls, I guess girls and boys, but I guess I'm thinking girls, particularly, or young women.

Well, I mean, the importance of uniting for a cause, not, not division, because we live in a world where we're told, you know, we're too fat, too thin, too short, too tall, too clever, too thick. Everything to separate us, separate us, separate us, separate us. And what happened at Greenham was that actually we all said 'We're women. And we're singing', and that was it. And we supported each other, and we listened to each other, and we didn't judge. So I suppose you know, what they can learn is that you have to be dedicated. And you have to stop division.

Yeah, I think that's a really good, that's a really good point. I think we've policed a lot, aren't we, and then we do the policing for them.

Yeah. Yeah, we do. Yeah. So.

So do you think you became more politicised?

Oh, god. Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. I mean, you know, to this day, I mean, I don't think I'm that political, but other people do. So, you know, it's all relevant, isn't it? And but yes, I mean, I, you know, I'm in the Labour Party, I'm in Momentum, in my women's CLP. And I mean, one of the things about moving to another part of the world is if you're in the Labour Party, you can just join the women's CLP and you know, you're going to meet women that are okay. So that's been quite okay. And um, yeah, I mean, every, you know, I'm a vegetarian. And actually, it's not so much for animal rights. It's for um, the way we farm. Yeah, I don't agree with the whole, the way we farm, completely. So, yeah, and the way that meat is processed is appalling. And so it is animal rights, but do you know what I mean?

I do, it's environmental.

Yes, environmental as well. Yes. So everything, you know, I'll recycle, I'll reuse.

So do you think it made you more, gave you a critical analysis, you know, like, just a bit more thoughtful about things?

Definitely. Definitely. Yeah. I mean I never ever buy new, when I can buy secondhand. I give everything, you know that I don't want I put on Free to Collect. I don't even bother - even though I'm poor, I don't sell things, I give them away. Because I think what goes around comes around, and if you're open - if you make a space, something will fill it and all that rubbish so I'm a bit cosmic I suppose. (Laughs).

I think, I think there is definitely something to that. And I think that there is a, you have to be able to look yourself in the mirror and think, you know, you know, I did my best.

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I tried to buy clothes in charity shops. And I mean, there's two reasons for that. One is I just can't afford new ones. But the other is it means that um, you know that they are being used properly,

things are being used properly and it's important - I love E-Bay as well. I get everything off E-Bay. Charity shops and E-Bay.

It's a good job you don't drink, you don't do that sort of 3 o'clock in the morning, oh my god, what the heck have I bought?

(Laughs). No, no. So yeah, yeah.

So some of the women that we've been to see, have said that they, either they or women that they knew came to Greenham to to kind of escape something else. It was a movement towards, but it was also a movement away from.

Yes, definitely. Yeah.

And a lot of them have said that it was, it was the, that a lot of it was down to men. So whether it was domestic or sexual violence, or abuse or just being controlled or dominated like your cousin or you know, was that your experience - that a lot of people went there, because...

Yeah, we were all running away from something. And it tended to be male. Yeah, definitely. Yeah, we were all searching for ourselves. As I said at the beginning, I really believe that, I think we all had a real real need. And um, a lot of that need was fulfilled at Greenham. Yeah, I think for a lot of us, we actually learnt what love was because we learn how to love and accept one another. It was, yeah.

Yeah. And not be in living in conflict all time. Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, that must have been, must have been nice to, to you know, to have a sense of peace.

Yeah, it was. It was, you know, and just to be able to talk about all the things that people told you you were mad for. Yeah, so, and suddenly I

went to Greenham and I wasn't mad anymore. I was normal. And it was quite nice. (Laughs).

And so, it the women that were there were just, you know, I suppose that you know, there wasn't like social workers or people who had any kind of particular, um, you know, skills - it was just the fact that you could talk together and non-judgementally...

Yeah.

That everybody could have a proper say about what it was that you know, had happened to them or...

Yeah.

...they were scared of, or whatever it was.

And everything I mean, right, right down to you know, I'd never even - I didn't know what couscous was.

Neither would I have done at that point.

No, I mean, I had quite a small, um, small world (laughs) that I'd lived in, and going to Greenham taught me so much, so much. I don't think I'd ever had a green pepper or red pepper until I went to Greenham, so there was a lot of, you know, it really broadened my horizons. And I mean, I still call it hippie-shit tea, you know, herbal tea. I'd never had herbal tea or anything like that. I mean it was like - brown sugar. I mean, there's so many things that I had no experience on until I went to Greenham.

And were you involved in the sort of nonviolent direct action, the sittings and you know, blockades and things like, or was that...?

Um, I can remember doing them, but I can't necessarily remember doing them what for, but I mean, yeah, I mean, when we did non-direct

actions, I mean, things like going on into the base and things. were part of that. Yeah, I mean, we just, I mean, there was nothing organised when I was there, there was nothing organised other than what we organised, or maybe we'd get word from another gate that something was going to happen and we'd go and join it. But there was no organ - I mean, there really wasn't any organisation. After the million women I don't think there was anything organised after that to be honest. So it was all...

Was that the Embrace the Base?

Yeah.

Right.

Yeah. So the Embrace the Base thing was, I think, probably one of the last big, big demos.

I think that was possibly one of the biggest and all women political demonstrations that there's ever been.

Yeah, I know, it was amazing. I remember seeing it on telly and being absolutely blown away. That was before I was involved.

And it seems to me I mean, I'm not a creative like arty drawing type person at all. But the art that came out of the base seemed, is just quite amazing, I think.

Yeah.

Really powerful. Moving. Very female as well.

Yes. Yes. I mean, I'm not an artist either. So, um, but you know, I, I wrote a lot of stuff when I was there. I used to write stuff then. And a lot of my working through stuff.

Diaries and things like that?

Yeah, in-fact we had a diary, the Red Gate diary, and during one of the evictions, we gave it to somebody to look after. And my cousin bumped into that person, I think it was at a gay pride or something one year, and they recognised them and said 'I've got the red book diary. I've got the red book diary', and somehow it never got - the contact details were lost or something. So somebody somewhere has got the Red Gate diary.

Oh, I might ask because we've got, we've had 200, over 200 women contact us, and we can only interview 100 because that's all the funding that we've got, although we're trying to get some more - just for the travel costs. And I'll ask if anybody knows. 'Cause, because, you know if we can get it actually, I'd rather give it to you and your cousin and then you can decide if you wanted...

...to release it.

Yeah. Well, or parts of it.

Yeah.

That's what's happened with with other women. They've either taken photographs of some of the pages, or they've um, spoken, spoken it out.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

And recorded it and sent it to us. And they are really - because they're so in the moment, they're incredibly visceral. Um.

Yes, yeah, exactly. Yeah. Yes.

So yeah, that's that's a really good call. I will, I will ask and see if anybody, if anybody's got it and give it back to you.

Are you traveling all over? Or are you just doing this area?

No, I'm, well, I live in the Midlands. So I was in Glastonbury on Monday, so only about 20 minutes away. Weston today, I'm in Derby on Friday. Where am I - Birmingham, so that's the closest one. I'm going to the Isle of Wight, Southampton. So, but because, so, the volunteers, there's 10 volunteers, and part of the funding was that some volunteers had to be more um, er, experienced in interviewing than others, so they've got, so, so I think what they've done is they've given the interviews to people that try to match the people up. If you know what I mean?

Yeah.

So, because I've done research before, they've sort of said to me, you know, how about, you know, do you want to interview these women? And I've just said yes to everybody, you know? Yes. You know, anybody. Yes. Yes to all! You know, I'll interview them all. So, so yeah, it's bits. It's, and I think, actually, quite a few women are from Wales down. There's not a lot North.

Right. Okay.

So women have tended to gravitate towards sort of the South East, a bit, but sort of Southwest, and Wales.

Yeah, I think there's quite a few Greenham women in Wales, I think hippies go to Wales!

Or Glastonbury.

Yes, Glastonbury, yes. So, yeah.

Yeah, that would be great if we could track that down...

It would.

...for you. That would be brilliant. The fact, the other thing I find amazing is that women have taken their papers, you know, their memories, those tangible pieces, and they've moved with them. for like 20/30 years. So

Yeah, I still somewhere got my Greenham woman 'Women are Everywhere' card that we had, and Greenham women badges. And yeah, I mean, I've probably got stuff. But to be fair, I've got what I call my tragedy box. (Laughs). I very rarely look at my tragedy box because it's just like, full of sad stuff. (Laughs). So it's probably all in my tragedy box. But yeah, yes, I mean, I probably have got stuff from back in the day. And my cousin was saying that Mel has got lots of photographs of us all at Greenham - I've hardly got any because we had to get them developed in those days.

Yeah, expensive.

And it was really expensive.

And you had to have a proper camera as well, didn't you?

Yeah, yeah. So it was all very expensive. So I never took photographs. But obviously other people did and got them developed. So, and there is, um, there is a documentary that I'm in. And the only reason I know about this is because one day - god, this must have been about 20 years ago, I would imagine, my son was flicking through the channels, and he went 'That was you, Mum'. And he flicked back. And it was a Greenham documentary. And it wasn't Carry Greenham Home, it was another one.

There's one that is from the perspective of the Greenham women and then they did a two part from the perspective of the, of the people who worked on the base.

Oh, right.

So those are on YouTube.

Oh, right.

I've been searching, obviously I've been searching - you know.

Oh, I might have a look because I'm in one of them. I'm in a couple of times, not speaking but you know, wearing an awful Christmas jumper but it was obviously very cold. So I must have been there in the winter, because it was obviously something that a visitor had left, or donated. And I was wearing a black jumper with white snowflakes on it.

Oh, I'll look out for that.

And I thought, oh god, how awful. (Laughs). Fancy being seen in that!

That well, any picture of anybody in the '80s wasn't great.

Yeah, and of course we used to have silly haircuts, shaved at the side.

I think they're great. Pictures are incredibly evocative, I think I think the women that...

Yes.

I don't know, like - they look spectacular.

Yeah, we were warriors.

Yeah.

We really were. Yeah.

And when I put stuff - because I put stuff on Twitter as well, and quite a few Greenham women have started to comment and follow and stuff.

And you know, they say, you know 'We were revolutionaries.' It was a revolution.'

Yeah, it was. It was! I mean, yeah, it really was, we really were revolutionaries, um, in our own way. And er, yeah, I think for women in London it was particularly so. And you seen all the rebel dykes and all that. That stuff. Yeah. And I know women that were involved in that.

They've contacted us.

Yeah, right. Yeah.

You know, great. Just brilliant.

Yeah. So yes, there's some amazing women out there. But not necessarily ones that I knew when I was there, but ones that I've met since. So, interesting.

So do you still, do you still meet - when you go to, to marches or Pride or whatever you still, on occasion meet people?

Not really, no. Because a) I don't tend to go to London Pride because it's too commercial. And I do go on marches. Um, but I tend to go with people I know. So no, not really. Um, I think, I think people, you know people think London's one big happy family - it isn't. Actually it's, you know, if you live in West London, you stay in West London, if you live in North London, you stay in North London. It's whatever.

Tribal.

Yeah, it is quite tribal. So I mean, you know, I used to go to Bar Whatever, in London, and um, I knew quite a lot of the trans community as well. So it you know, yeah, I mean, there's quite a lot of division in the lesbian community at the moment with all the, you know, the transphobic stuff going on, and whatever. Myself, I think trans people are where we were in the '80s. And I think it's a battle that we need to

fight together. I don't understand all the division really, but people have got a right to their own thoughts and feelings. Um, as long as we don't actively hurt anyone.

How do you think that would have played out at Greenham - you know if it's women only?

Well, I don't think it matters because that situation didn't arise. So I don't think it really matters. I think what matters is that we're now in 2019. And times have changed, and our understanding has changed. And (sighs), my own feeling is that I can choose whether I want to be in a space with - that's only biological women or has trans women in it. Um, and I just think there's enough hating and enough division going on, and we need to just actually accept who we are. And I think if we're secure in who we are as individuals, it's much easier to accept other people for what they are. And self identification is actually really important. Yeah, so as long as nobody's infringing on me and my right to exist, I'm quite happy to coexist alongside people. And, you know, I mean, when I was young, I read, I didn't read books by men, I didn't do all sorts of things that now I do, you know, I've got male friends. I'm much more integrated into society than I was when I was younger. So um, that's just how it works.

And do you think that's because you're much more grounded and centered in yourself?

Yeah.

More sure of yourself. So, you know, you get to pick and choose more, rather than...

Yeah. And you know, it's okay for people not to have the same ideas as me. It's, it doesn't mean that I'm going to hang out with people who worship Trump. You know, it doesn't mean that. But it means you know, it - it means that people are allowed to be who - my granddaughter's a Muslim, for instance. And that's what she chose to

be and so she is one and that's fine. And nobody in our family's got a problem with that. None of us are religious, um, but she wants to be a Muslim. That's her business. Um, maybe when I was younger, I would have had a problem with that because I would have thought that anyone that was religious needed a gun to their head. Yeah. So I mean, that's a bit extreme, but you know what I mean, I think...

Positions get polarised.

Yeah, there's this idea that as you get older, you get more, er, less broad minded. But I think, I don't think that is my experience. I think as I get older, I become much more open and more accepting. So I don't know why people think that, but maybe it's because I'm not normal. I don't know.

Well, my, and this is a gross generalisation, I know, but I think women do get more open minded. I think I think men can narrow a bit.

Oh right. Okay.

I think they get a bit sort of, you know, I think they get to a point where learning new things is, is quite difficult. Whereas I think that women hit 50, and it's almost like, it opens up a bit more, you know.

Right. Yeah. That makes...

I think we move almost like having - because we go through our second puberty, don't we?

Yeah. Yeah.

And I think there's, there's a lot of there's a lot of learning for that.

Incredible. Incredible amount. Yeah. I mean being old's wonderful. I love being old.

I do.

I wouldn't be young for all the money in the world.

I do. 17 was my worst. Absolute worst. I wouldn't be 17 again, for anything.

I think for me, yeah. Yeah, I think it started to really, really drastically improve once I got to about 32, but, you know, my early, early 20s, teens and early 20s I wouldn't go there again for all the money in the world. And you know, people say 'Oh, your school years are your best'. Well mine weren't! I'm sorry, I hated school. I hated. Yeah. So it's a real struggle, but being old is great. Because you can wear what you want, you don't give a shit what people think. Um, you know, try not to hurt people. And um, just go around - mind your own business and get on with your life.

Yeah, yeah.

So it's wonderful.

No, it is, it's good. It's, it's, it's definitely something that I have - I've changed quite a lot since, I don't know when - it's a gradual process, isn't it? But I, when I look back now, I'm a different person now to the person that I was.

Yeah, absolutely. When you start staying in! (Laughs).

Saturday night, I'm staying in - I'm in my pyjamas and dressing down and it's 5 o'clock in the evening.

(Laughs). Yes! I know. It's like, and when you're young, you think old people are so boring, but they're really not. (Laughs).

Well it's, you know. And I'm quite happy for young people to be going out.

Yeah, so am I.

I know what's out there. I've been in there - done it, it's not my turn anymore.

God yeah. When I was young, I spent half my life like looking for the party.

Oh, god. Yeah. Yeah.

And there wasn't one. You know, I was looking for a party in my soul, I think actually.

Or a distraction, something to...

Yes. I mean, that's the other thing - when you're young, I surrounded myself with people, I had to be. Now, I love being on my own. I think I'm just the best company in the world. I'm quite happy to spend years on my own. And not see anybody. I mean, obviously I have to, because I have to go to into work.

So do what you work around here now?

Yeah, I work for Sainsbury's. So, um, yeah, I got fed up of commuting. And I just had enough when I lived in London, and er, commuting and you know, the menopause just really don't go together. And I got a job in my local Sainsbury's and I thought I'll just do that for 6 months, but actually, when you're old in London, it's quite hard to get a job. And you're either - if you don't want to do a job that you've done before, you're always overqualified. But you can get a job in Sainsbury's, so I worked there, and actually I've been with Sainsbury's for 4 and a half years, and when I moved, I transferred down here - but I hate it here, I hate it.

Really?

It's a big - I was in a local convenience and it was really nice. I knew all my customers, did everything, bit of everything. In a big one it's a completely different world. And I mean, I'm waking up at night in pain, in my, in my arm here because I'm just doing...

Repetitive, like repetitive strain injuries.

Well I don't know what it is, but I think it is from reaching at the back and pulling everything forward to check everything's in date. I think that it's - I'm not on the tills - I couldn't bear that, but I think I might end up going on them because physically, I'm not up to doing the job that I'm doing at the moment. But I mean, I'm applying like mad for other jobs. So...

I'm surprised they haven't got a little thing to get the stuff from the back - like a gizmo.

**No, haven't got gizmos, they don't have gizmos in Sainsbury's!
(Laughs).**

So is there any moment that you would say is the most vivid in your mind about Greenham - is there, if somebody said to you 'Tell me about Greenham,' was there something that springs to mind - a picture or a song, or is it you around the fire - or I don't know.

I think, I don't think there was any one particular thing that I can think of. I think it was just everything. It was just that total feeling, that total feeling of belonging, and that - and having a reason, having a reason to just go on, and, and being part of something. Yeah, I think that was it really for me.

So when you left, did your cousin leave at the same time - did you leave together?

Err, no. I think - we weren't always there together, either. We, you know, we, because she obviously found her own set of friends as well and

would go off with them. And I would go off with mine. And er, yeah, so I think I think '84/'85 we both - must be '85 that we both sort of left I think, towards the end of '85. I think things - I think the kids were getting older, and there was a lot of, we were under pressure because it wasn't a you know, nice environment for them. And you have to you know, in those days, they took your kids away just for being a lesbian. So you had to be quite careful.

Did that happen to anybody?

No, but we both fought custody cases for our children. Yeah.

While you were there?

No, we left there because you couldn't win if you were there. So you had to leave.

Oh my god.

So, yeah, my cousin fought - she won. And I fought some years later, by that time, I had all three of mine, and I won - but I spent 5 days in court, during which time my friends, not my lover, just my friends footwear was mentioned five times, because obviously her shoes had a real impact on my parenting ability. So yeah, I mean, there was horrendous, horrendous um...

Pressure?

Yeah, we were like, yeah, it wasn't easy, being a lesbian mother in the '80s. It really wasn't.

And so the custody - so the sort of the reasons that they gave, were you were an unfit mother because of your sexuality and presumably other things as well?

Morality.

Oh, right, okay.

Sexuality, yes. That was all tied in with morality.

So they couldn't even say the word sexuality.

So yeah.

It had to be called something else?

But yes I mean it was - yeah, I mean, it was all to do with sexuality. And, er, you know, lesbians couldn't bring up children. And er, it was all clause 28 wasn't it? She'd been - when Thatcher brought out clause 28 we weren't allowed to promote homosexuality. And um, that sort of trickled down into the that you weren't allowed to be openly a lesbian.

And have children?

Yeah, I mean, it was. Yeah, it was horrible. It was awful. And, you know, being uneducated working class, with a care background, it wasn't an easy fight. But you know, I did fight and I did win. Haha!

Did they have anything to do with their dad?

No, they've all got different fathers. So that was another reason - my children have all got different fathers.

Another reason why they felt - and so who, was one of the dads wanted custody of...

One of the dads, and my mother. Yeah.

Oh, wow.

Yeah. So and they fought long and hard, but I won, so it didn't matter. Well, I mean, it did matter. It matters enormously. It was horrendous. And I haven't had anything to do with my mother for over 30 years. So...

Why, why - did she honestly think she was doing that for the best?

No, she had done it to me all my life. Yeah, that's why I was in care so much that um, she channelled her guilt through me. And I was to blame for everything that - you know, she had mental health problems. And I was blamed for most things that had happened in her life and er, I wouldn't do as I was told - I wouldn't shut up. Yeah. So I was the one who talked about sexual abuse. I was the one. So yeah, it was all um, yeah, she was just my mother really.

And did the sexual abuse go to court?

No, no, no. I mean, this was um, when, when we were kids. Yeah, I mean, she just like denied it ever happened and said we were liars. All that sort of thing. Which was quite sad in a way, because I had a real understanding of her, and how she had come to be, and how difficult her life had been, and made the mistake of trying to talk to her about it. And she could not come to terms with who she was. And you know, she had illegitimate children in the early '60s. She was a woman born out of her time as well. She had mental health problems and, er, you know, she really, really, really suffered. But I think one of two things happens - either you come to terms with who you are, and you get your head around it and you deal with your shit and - or you don't. And she didn't. So um...

(Edit in recording).

One of the women I went to see, she said 'Oh, I've kept a diary.' But she said when they started doing the evictions in '84, two three times day, she said 'I couldn't keep a diary anymore. I just couldn't write in it because we just couldn't, I couldn't keep the stuff safe and dry' and all the rest of it. And I thought god it's such a parallel with sexual abuse

and domestic abuse. Because what the police say is 'Oh, keep a diary of when it happens, and what happened.' But of course, you can't keep a diary, because you can't keep it safe.

Of-course not, of-course not. So yeah right.

So it's very and, you know, again, I've got, you know, other people I know one - one woman I know used to keep a diary of her abuse when she was younger. And she had a little code for it. And then when she was older, she went to court, and they - she thought her diaries would help her because she kept, you know, said - and they were used against her. Because in amongst all of the, you know, code for what had been happening to her, she'd say, you know, had a really great day with dad - we did this, did that, did the other, you know, he's a great guy. And they were saying 'Well, you can't possibly be being abused if you're...' and of-course you can, you know, you can be..

Yeah, right.

You know, her was her dad, she's not going to get another one.

Exactly. Yes. Yes, exactly. I mean, that's ambivalence, isn't it so...

Yeah, and there is a conflict, and it is difficult, and it's totally non-intuitive, because people expect you to hate them, you know, and you do hate them on one level.

Yes.

You know, obviously. So yeah, it's um, it's it, is it's, it's complex, and I just don't think that as a society we are prepared. You know, we like those binaries. Yeah, you know, it's you're a good person. You're a bad person. Well what if you're both?

Yeah, right. Yeah.

Which most of us are to be honest. Anyway.

Yeah. Except for me - I'm perfect! (Laughs).

Apart from you. I've got that on tape now.

(Laughs).

So. Is there anything else that you that you want to talk about?

I'm sure I'll think of millions of things when you've left.

I know. I, I - so how, how important do you think was the, um, was the the the ability to be openly lesbian at the camp within the camp? Do you think...

God massively, massively. Absolutely massively.

And if you were not lesbian, if you were a heterosexual woman was - were you still accepted? Was it still okay?

Yeah, it was okay to be anything. It was absolutely okay. But a lot of us weren't. And I think a lot of um women had dalliances as well with other women. Um, perhaps went on to have straight relationships later. But um, yeah, I mean, it was, it was very safe. It was it was very, very safe.

And was it safe - was it physically safe? I mean, was there, because again, I've heard of...

No, it wasn't physically safe. People used to come and yeah, I mean, cars would pull up and throw things at you and shout things at you. I mean, I remember one morning I got up really, really early - it was beautiful. Beautiful, beautiful spring morning, and I was sitting by the fire and sewing. And this car pulled up and they were out of the sunroof with a camera, taking photographs, yeah. And shouting abuse and I just thought uuugh? Like, it just - the two things didn't seem to really

marry, but you know that it happened. And it was frightening if it happened at night when you're asleep.

So did they come onto the camp? Did people come onto the camp at night? Or did they just drive by and chuck stuff?

Um, I think they tended to just drive by, because we were quite close to the road. And I think actually they were probably a bit frightened of us, as much as we were of them, because we were quite scary. I mean, sometimes the police would come on and put the fire out, and like harass us all at night and things.

What do you mean, harass?

Well, we'd all be sitting around the fire playing, you know, singing or whatever. And I remember one particular time, there was a couple of kids asleep around the fire and they came and they just threw dirt or something on the fire, and all the sparks went all over the children who were lying in nylon sleeping bags, you know, and they could have been burned. It was like really quite a really violent thing to do to us and um, things like that went on, and I just, like, uuurrgh, threatened to evict us and, like, do an eviction there and then, so, yeah. Um, but yeah, I mean, I think it's probably a damn sight safer than anywhere else I've lived.

Yeah. That's a sad fact. Isn't it?

Yeah. Yeah. So. It was alright.