

## Hoonie Feltham

So I thought we'd start talking about what motivated you to visit Greenham Common in the first place?

Um, well, the principal guiding motivation is being a Quaker. Because Quakers don't fight. I've been Quaker since I was a child. So it was a completely natural thing for me to be involved in that. So that's a kind of - a whole of my life background. But, um, the other problem was, when I was at LSE, Mrs. Thatcher was some minister for food or schools or something or other, and she withdrew the milk from children. She had the moniker of 'Maggie Thatcher Milk Snatcher'. And then she, as it were, metaphorically got into bed with Mr. Reagan, and they started making bombs together, in inverted commas. She, um, she considered it - well I mean, they both had their vested interest, she got some protection from - against Russia, from the US, and the US extended their territorial interests all the way over to Europe. So, you know, it was a plus plus for both of them. But, um, yeah, for people like me, and there are millions of them, they were very terrified to have unbelievable amounts of nuclear bombs, you know, nanoseconds away from London, pointing at Russia. I mean, it was just, you know, nobody was ever asked if that's okay. Something that could have, I don't know - it just beggars belief what could have happened if they started throwing bombs around. I remember really well - I had my first child while living in Southfields - you'll know that neck of the woods. And um, I remember - and I was in a women's group at the time, and I remember discussing and thinking bitterly, what should I do? Shall I put some baked beans in the cupboard under the stairs, and a little Primus stove? Or should I just pick up this child of mine and go outside when the bombs start raining down, and just get wiped? And we discussed that at length very seriously. It was a terrifying time to live through with Margaret Thatcher kind of um, she was like a candle burning incredibly bright. She loved power so much. She was a shining kind of craziness. And invincible - nobody, nobody I mean male politicians who are the norm had never had to deal with women politicians, and to have a woman Prime Minister

who was so determined. Nobody really stood up to her. And I think it's actually Reagan, who was more of a peacenik with Gorbachev, who was his opposite number in Russia. And Mrs. Thatcher had to climb down, but I mean, left to her own devices - the mind absolutely, it's almost unbearable. It's really - it is unbearable to even remember it actually, it makes my eyes smart. So when whoever the people were who started camping - well, hang on, let me retract. There were huge demonstrations of women going down there, and almost all of them were peaceniks, really, that was the thing. How dare you put nuclear bombs in our country, kind of thing. And so there was a absolutely, completely national - from Shetland down to the Isle of Wight, people coming to Greenham. And then I think that people wanted to stay. And from very early on the police were looking all the time to undermine the people they saw as leaders. So there was arrests, and and appearances at Newbury Magistrates Court all the time, and then that would be another location for more demonstrations and things. And, um, so I think, I think it was that it was the length of the, of the protest, and the kind of having somewhere safe for people to be, that the camps took place. And so people lived down there, and they were pretty substantial. They were tings - branches of trees, covered in plastic. And they were called benders, these things. And they were kind of - you can't see my hands on the thing! But they were interwoven, they were interwoven structures, sort of like tents, but, you know, just in other words, covering as large an area as you can - to be dry. And then sort of demonstrators would bring down loads of stuff, like beds and mattresses and all kinds of things. So you never went empty handed to Greenham. Um, so, I went to two huge demonstrations there. And one at the Magistrates Court, and the demonstrations were women linking hands all the way around the base, it was called Embrace the Base. And um, then there was a signal - so your hands are out like this, and you're just holding hands with two women either side. And somebody started - how these signals started, I have no idea - but somebody, as the woman joined hands, you know, you waited and you waited until you got a squeeze in one of your hands. And that was an indication that we were all joined up. So when all the way around, I don't know how many miles it was. But that was the signal, and then there was an unbelievable whoop of

joy, you know, when we realised we'd embrace the base. And that happened over and over and over. Yeah, it was very powerful, really powerful. And most women took baby grows from their children, and they sewed them onto the fence. And I did that the fence. The fence was absolutely covered in...sorry (becomes emotional) it's very, very, very powerful memory, this. And we won, which is great. Um, so we, you know, when children were there - loads of children, lots of babies and pooches and stuff. And I think it was - you know that funny feeling I had at home about whether or not I should put baked beans and a Primus stove in the - I can't have been alone about that, because there was something so life and death about that demonstration. A sense of existential terror of all these bombs was just unbelievably powerful. And so the fear was a real driver. People - all the women inhabited in their imagination 'What if?', and, you know, with their children just being wiped out. Because maniacs love of power. I think god for Mr. Gorbachev, I can tell you. He was the one who started talking sense. So another story about the actual fence - there's two really, one was one time, it must have been more than twice that I was down there because I've got all these memories of it. I remember being down there once, and the Socialist Workers' Party arrived, and they were all men. There weren't any women, and they were all kind of like, not that I'm meaning to knock bikers, but they were all big kind of bike-y type guys. And there were a hell of a lot of them there. And they tried to drown us out. Because there was a lot of those like, I can't do it, but you know, that kind of yodelling yell that Middle Eastern women doing - it's a kind of cry.

Yes.

And there was an awful lot of that. It's got a name that sound, I can't remember.

I know exactly what you mean, but I can't remember the name.

Yeah. So and, and that was really difficult because they - the men were trying to drown the women out. I don't know what their purpose was.

They had these signs saying 'Jobs, not bombs'. So in their cack-handed way they thought if we come along and support these women, and our agenda is to have jobs and have people working. You know, maybe we can persist, but it really was ghastly, it was a terrible business getting them out of there. I don't remember what happened, but they finally left. So that was one, one story. And then another story was I went down with my best friend called Sarah. And she - her parents came. And they're all Quakers. And Sarah and I were together at the wire, at the fence, and her mum, and her dad - he, he just wasn't even a blink of an eye. He just stood back. He just stood back and honoured our effort. And passed us cups of tea every now and then. And so there's kind of, you know, the juxtaposition of the Socialist Workers' Party and this, you know, this grandfather, actually - because Sarah, yeah, we both had children. It was just extraordinary. And then there is one more story I remember. I told you the one about the booze? I'll tell you it again.

Yes, please do.

Yeah. So time went by, years went by actually. And um, when it was perfectly obvious to everyone that this camp wasn't going anywhere, people who'd been down as visitors - as I had - were worried about the women down there. There was some quite difficult stories coming out in the press, which you never knew whether or not they were true, because the press didn't want to honour this demonstration. And so we did a whip round at work - I was a social worker at the time for London Borough of Wandsworth. And we did a whip round in our area office, and got a hell of a lot of money, then went to Sainsbury's and bought a ton of stuff, including quite a lot of whiskey and gin and I don't know what. We went down and took this. And I knew where to go. And then one of the kind of leaders who, who was there, I think we must have asked who - 'We've brought some food for you. Who should we give this to?' So we were directed to this person. She took one look at our big Sainsbury's bags and said 'You can't bring that booze here. It's absolutely hopeless. You must take it away.' Which we did, and we got the money back, and got the money to them somehow or other. But that was because, and unless you'd been there you would never really

have known about this, which was that a lot of um, homeless women probably - and quite a high level of mental health problems, I imagine. I don't know, this for a fact, would land up at Greenham Common for shelter, and company. And if you possibly could a swig of whiskey, but the women who um, occupied leadership roles - I don't want to say assumed because that sounds much to kind of directive. But I mean, I think people - women who had leadership qualities sort of percolated to those roles, if you see what I mean. And the whole thing - it must have had foresight to say if this all breaks down because everybody's drunk and fighting and crazy, you know, it's not going to look very good. So they had their eye on the message, which was really admirable. And so that's how it sort of came down to us which was take the booze away, it's hopeless here. So we did. Um, oh, and one more story, one more story, which was my son was 3 at the time or 4, and um, it wasn't too busy - I think we must have got there - must have been a Saturday - must have got there in the morning. And there was this very young American soldier in this tower - there were sort of towers, really tall with a you know barrier - you could see the soldier very clearly, and they just stood there all over the common, these things, and looked out for I don't know what terrifying fear they imagined, I don't know! (Laughs). Apart from us women! Anyway, there weren't very many people there, so this lovely son - his name's (inaudible), he called out, he says 'Hello!' - he had a real London accent, and this soldier who was sort of bored out of his mind looked out and he said (adopts American accent) 'Hi! What's happening?', something like that. And then (inaudible) said to him (adopts Cockney accent) 'Why don't you come down here and join us? It's much more fun!'

Aww!

And this Collier kind of went 'I wish I could'. It was really nice, lovely little interaction between these two, because he was very young, the young man - he's probably just recruited into the army, you know?

What were the relationships like? What you kind of sensed from being there between the soldiers and the women who were camped around?

Um, well, I think the reactions went across a spectrum between infuriated - because they made so much noise, and they were always there, and being troublesome, you know? And um, I don't know, just kind of disbelief really, because what were they doing there in a foreign land, protecting these bombs from an unknown risk. So I, I think there were some interactions like the one with my son and this young soldier, but I can't really answer that question because I didn't know. It was never, it was never um, the British government spoke for the American protection. So you didn't really hear very many - I mean Mr. Reagan would say something or other. Interestingly, as the I don't know, if you know this from your reading, but interestingly, as a demonstration went on into several years, I maybe the third or fourth year or whatever, um Mrs. Thatcher said in Parliament, that um, it may be - there may be an occasion when the police might have to use weapons against the women. Did you know about this?

I didn't, no.

And there was the most appalling betrayal by um - Wedgwood Benn was his name at the time - his son's currently in Parliament. Anthony Wedgwood Benn - Tony Benn, he became known as, because he dropped the Wedgwood. And there's a you know, Putney, don't you?

Yes, yeah.

So there's a church on the south bank of - it's either the north or the south! I can't remember how the bends go around Putney, but there's been a big curve, isn't there?

Yes, yeah.

There's a church - a very, very famous church, where there was a debate during the Civil War in that church.

Yes, I think I know.

**Is it called St Mary's? It might well be St. Mary's.**

It's sort of an old Norman-y thing, isn't it? Yeah.

**Yeah. And there was a debate there again. And Wedgwood Benn was there, and I asked him a question - the place was absolutely packed with women and masses of press. And he was pressed into saying 'Well, you know, as a last resort, I would support the police using arms.' That was it. He never really recovered from that, you know. That was it. Yes, it's okay to shoot women who are protesting about their children being blown up by bombs. Yep, that's okay, go for it.**

Yeah, nonviolent means as well. Gosh.

**Yeah.**

And was, did you sense that the fear of violence was something that was very prevalent?

**Mrs. Thatcher raised - she was asked question in Parliament, and she said 'If necessary, yes.'**

And people really felt like that might have come through?

**Yeah, yeah. They were - definitely because there were periods like that when the - I think the women must have cut through or something. Did you say to me earlier that they did cut through?**

They did. Yeah, yeah. And also climbed over - I was seeing all of these photos where they..

**They had barbed wire at the top though.**

They did. But there are these pictures of women climbing over the barbed wire, dressed up as teddy bears, going on a teddy bears picnic,

and literally climbing right over the barbed wire. Yeah. And there was another occasion where some women were occupying one of the towers. They made it all the way up there. And there was this one story I was reading a woman who said that she got into a top secret area and there was an American soldier there who had his gun to her head and said 'I've given her the three warnings, she's not leaving. What do I do? Do I shoot?' you know, and she obviously survived. You know, she told the story.

**I never heard about that. Amazing.**

So I think, yeah, that's why I thought...

**More coffee?**

Thank you. Um, your art piece is so evocative with that sort of barbed wire coming forward, because that really was, you know gave you that sense.

**I didn't know - I never saw that, I never was part of that. It was all in my imagination. Doing that piece - I went shopping, got some chicken wire from a hardware store, got a piece of wood, got some silk stamps, you know, put it on the back and just started painting. It was such a powerful and emotional response to the idea. And it was hung in a show here. Um, it, I never saw that, but it was how I felt about it. I felt, um, I wasn't frightened when I was there because I was - there were so many of us. But the idea of these nuclear bombs was so terrifying, and the chaos was so terrifying. It - I really don't think that people talk about this enough, which was that um, the gut wrenching level of determination to save our children from these crazy people. It could not be anything more powerful. Most of the women were very young who were there. I was very young. You know, we're just having our first babies.**

And that was why it was things like the baby grows that we're being sewn onto the...



Yeah, absolutely. And you know, the, the plastic, the plastic name tags from - which the midwife put on the baby's wrist. You know they were absolutely freighted with emotional significance, all these things. It's just extraordinary and very, very, very highly motivating. You know? Well, I don't know, I mean the Quakers were extremely, they were extremely - and I really mean in the extreme they were prepared to, they were prepared to go to prison, and go on hunger strike for damn nearly 4 years, while the First World War was on. The privations they went through were incredible. And, and that was a powerful witness to the, to the Quaker testimonies of which is we don't fight - that originated in the Civil War. But it didn't have the emotional capacity of the life of your child. How could it have done? So I think that's why, I think that's what fed into the passion and the power of that lengthy protest.

Did the Quakers organise a sort of countrywide response to Greenham? Was it sort of like a formalised thing?

No people came from - I mean, people would - I was at Wandsworth meeting at the time. But I didn't actually go with Wandsworth friends, with a capital F. But I imagine that people came from - joined as friends with a capital F, and a small f from their meeting houses, and went.

So who did you go with?

I went with my friend Sarah.

Right.

But neither of us actually were going to meeting at that point. Don't think we were going - we didn't have a regular meeting. Mine would have been - mine was Wandsworth, but I don't know, no, she lived over in the east end, she lived in Hackney, and I don't think she went to meeting. Now she goes to meeting. But no, I think we'd dropped that from school. And she, Sarah was a fantastically left wing person. She

**was a very powerful, strong, early feminist in a very good tradition.  
(Laughs).**

So would you say maybe it was, it was more the sort of feminist aspect that drew you?

**Much more than god, yeah, definitely. And, you know, the, as I keep going back to, I think it was the incredible insult that you could have contributed, contributed to the population of our country by having children. And then, you know, this very tangible and real and talked about in the papers every day, you know, of the bombs will come raining down, you know, every single day there was a threat of it. You should check some of the newspapers at the time, you know, you should have a look at some of those. It was pretty bloody knife edge, you know. It wasn't until Gorbachev - I can't remember who the Russian president was before him - but when he came, then things changed. Because he wasn't so careless. And so, you know, he saw the bigger picture.**

How did you feel about the way that the Greenham common protest was being depicted in newspapers in the news?

**At the time?**

At the time, yeah. What was that like? Do you remember?

**Yeah, I do remember it was in the papers all the time. Well, it was um, it was male owned newspapers with male journalists. And I mean, the left wing press took a different view to the right wing press. But even across those sort of political camps, if you will, you know, there was always a slightly patronising idea about what are these women doing, you know, why aren't they at home? Or something or other. I mean, it had a funny smell about it, as far as the general public were concerned, which was what are these women doing? You know, although women from all over the country were there, it was extraordinary.**

Did you think that's carried over a bit in the way that we think about Greenham common today, that sort of almost...

**Mythical.**

Mythical, mythical, why mythical?

**I don't know, because it was - it went on for so long, and it was so huge. And so many people were involved. And the risks were so high, they could not be higher. That was the nearest we came to nuclear war ever. You know, we talked about nuclear bombs, but we didn't have god knows how many of those American bombs there were on British soil. I don't know how many they were. Mad.**

We were talking a bit earlier about, it's sort of interesting how frequently we hear about - particularly at the moment because of the anniversary about Suffrage, that's another big sort of women's movement, fight for women's rights, but we also say, equally Greenham Common doesn't seem to be being memorised or commemorated in the same way. Did you have a sense as to why?

**No I don't, but if you were to ask me an aligned question, but slightly different, which is, which do I think over the fullness of time was more important - women getting the vote and having equal rights, to um, this fantastically high stakes poker game between Russia and America? I'd say in the fullness of time, women getting the vote was tons more important, really. But we couldn't have known that.**

Might - why do you think it was so much more important?

**What having the vote?**

Having the vote, yeah.

**Well simple - equal rights. Of-course we should have equal rights.**

Sorry, I know it's a stupid question. Sometimes it is helpful to have it, you know, really said out, exactly. Exactly.

**Yeah.**

What did you think - we've spoken a little bit about the, the relationships between kind of the men and the woman, and also kind of the woman being there so frequently, because of their concern about the future for their children. So how do you think that relates, or how do you feel about the decision for it to be a women only protest, women only camp?

**100% support. It was not - the whole um, protest would have disintegrated if men had been there. There would have been arguments about who's in control. And um, I mean, there were arguments enough about who was in control, you know, and laying down ground rules in a place that which was a kind of a new republic, you know, in the middle of fucking nowhere. Where is this country? Hello! Greenham Common, you know! And the rules were established by women who were strong and responsible. And very, very - and, and not risk averse. They were prepared to go all the way, really. I mean, a lot of - hell of a lot of public disorder stuff was going on at the Magistrates Court. But no, it's absolutely had to be women only. And this friend of mine who did I tell you that while we were recorded, you know, at that dinner party got really shirty with me. Well, I was at this dinner party and um we got on to talking about Greenham. And this couple started talking about it, and he got really shirty. Well they both got really shirty, because the women kept him back from joining hands, and being up at the fence. And it was an unspoken - and then occasionally demonstrated by the women, which is that your role is to support us. If you've got a you know, flask of tea, that'd be great. But otherwise, just support us - be there with your partner. You know, whatever, whatever. If anything needs to be done help, you know. He just didn't get it. And this man who, as I've said to you is desperately ill, and I'm tremendously fond of him, but he went down in my estimation a huge amount when he, he, he that he just said 'What's that about?**

**What's important is the people being able to demonstrate', you know, he just didn't get it. Poor thing. (Laughs).**

So that exclusion is it that men so frequently come across that actually, sometimes they can be so defensive as to why they've been excluded. They don't really, they can't quite see or follow through as to why that might be sometimes, I think.

**Yes, and how about the fact that if he had, if he had somehow or other succeeded in his wish to be at the, at the wire, he would have been unique and singular. (Laughs). This extraordinary idea that that's where he wanted to be. I mean, I don't think he'd thought it through, really.**

Yeah, newspaper reports the one man, yeah...

**The token willy! (Laughs).**

(Laughs). Taking away from every body else. Like thanks! Um, a lot of the reading that I have done, which is sort of like official histories of Greenham Common - they're very much saying that it was a collective process of decision making. But from what you've been telling me, it sounds like, there were definitely women who were taking leadership roles, who were perhaps in charge, do you think that...

**But then you're covering two areas. One is the permanent camp. The other is an announcement somehow or other - I don't know how it ever got announced, but. maybe through left wing magazines, or whatever, that we're having another demo at Greenham on the 4th of May. And people would get to hear about that, and all the women would come. So there's, and that, that's how it started. It started with demonstrations of people coming for the day. And then there were so many of them that people started to build this with the other group - build up these camps, these benders. And so they're a different population. Because the first group who came for the demonstration would come down all the way from, you know, Newcastle, and, and um, demonstrate on the relevant day and chat to the police (laughs) and all the rest of it. And then there**

were ones who wanted to keep a permanent demonstration going, who - the women who stayed there. And as we've already covered, you know, that attracted some people who were quite difficult, and who weren't necessarily terribly interested in the demonstration in the first place anyway, I don't know. I don't know. But what was your question again, what was...

I was just interested that, you know, when you read about the camps themselves, um a lot of the readings makes it out that it was collective decision making. But actually, it sounds like there were, you know, I mean, you have to have people who are leading or in charge of certain things. So I just sort of wondering how those two...

Well, that story I told you about the Christmas hamper kind of thing is the only one I have. And that's when it was very clear that there was these two women who we met, who were in leadership roles. And um I never stayed there, so I don't know. But there had to be some kind of order in these camps, and somebody had to impose order. And they did. And those camps worked.

Did you when you went did you visit - this is me now not not knowing how it was all laid out - because I've read about all these different gates with different collections. So when you visited would you go to the same gate? Or was it kind of a more...

It's so huge that you go to the part that you land up at from the bus that takes you, because who knew about public transport or wherever you could park, or whatever. I mean, there wasn't any, nowhere around the perimeter fence had greater status than anywhere else. The point was to embrace the base, which I think there was never a time when there was a big demo, that that didn't happen. It's interesting, it'd be - I really do recommend to you to look up towards the end of the protest. And the newspapers and stuff about Wedgwood Benn and this debate in Parliament when Margaret Thatcher said 'If necessary, they'll have to use, they'll have to use weapons'. Because that was a point, yeah, I think that was towards the end of the whole thing that but um, that's an

interesting, that's an interesting bit of information to juxtapose against the, the unofficial leadership of the permanent camps, because - and it's interesting when women went to to the court in Newbury and in Berkshire and stuff - I'm not sure that things ever went to the Crown Court. I've got a feeling that they remained in the Mags. But it I've never thought about this before, but it is interesting about to what extent did keeping order at the benders extended to helping women get to the Magistrates Courts and everything. I simply don't know how that worked. And where the money came from. No idea.

You said you visited Magistrates Court once?

**Yeah, yeah.**

What was that like?

**Wow, mad - because there were so many people outside, you know, bellowing and shouting and singing - a lot of singing - drowning people out with singing. There were Greenham songs - I can't remember, I've probably got a booklet of them somewhere, if I only knew where to look.**

And did women who visit - did they know those songs as well? Did they permeate out?

**They're not very complicated songs! Once you do one round, you've got it kind of thing, you know! I don't know, I can't remember them at all but I know we sang a lot.**

Yeah, that's an effective song, isn't it? You hear it once and you've got it.

**Very effective. Yeah.**

And so you're, you're an artist now. I can say so, can I say so? Can I say so? You're grimacing! I'm going to say so.

**Okay. Fair enough. You decide.**

I'm going to decide, because I've seen and I - and yes, you are an artist.

**Okay.**

What - do you see art playing an important role in activism?

**Yes, of-course. It's essential. What a funny question. How on earth do you think the Russian revolution happened unless there'd been brutalist art? Brutalist art was the, the moniker, the the leitmotif of the, you know, the, what it looked like, the birth of communism. Absolutely pivotal, of-course, artists. Yeah.**

I feel you're looking at me like I'm...

**The idiot!**

I think that I never want to ask a question that is leading. You know where I say so artist is the most - you know, um so stop looking at me like that please - I'm in agreement with you, I promise! And do you - are there particular sort of artworks, or sort of expressions of art that you associate with Greenham at all? That are specific to that?

**Um, colour. Massive amounts of colour. It was real primary colour stuff. Because you know, everything was very bright, very colourful. You know, I think, I think probably bell-bottom trousers were still in then, and everybody was covered in mud and filthy dirty. And it was pretty chaotic and mad, although it always had a structure. Yeah, very, very colourful. Can you imagine these huge fences, with all these things tied to it - it was amazing. Mad, but amazing. You wouldn't describe it as artistic - chaos and amazing.**

And then the question that we've been asked to ask everybody, for cohesion, and this is a leading question. Could you explain why you think it's important that Greenham is remembered by subsequent generations?



**Because it was probably - after the um, god knows how many years struggle for the vote - but it was definitely the most important demonstration by women subsequently, there hasn't been anything like it. And it's in a very, very honourable tradition. Which we - and I, you could be my daughter, you know, we can be proud of - we did that. We succeeded.**

Are your children involved in activism at all? Have you passed it on?

**My oldest son is pretty left wing. My youngest son has a social conscience, but he doesn't do much about it. That's interesting, because I just saw at the beginning of this an index which says Greenham common - supporting Greenham common peace camp. So where are you? (Sound of papers being moved). That's when I had my hair permed. Disgusting! Here you are, fourth four women on trial for trying to keep the peace. You can take a photograph of that if you would like to?**

I would love to.

**Anne Priestly. Something and Lannon (?) who was my child - outside Newbury Mags Court supporting fourth four women. Spring '83 that was.**

Wow!

**We'll move it over to the chair. Look at this little lad! He's 40 now - can you imagine?**

What was it like taking, taking him to the camp?

**He loved it - it's a lot of noise!**

Were there lots of other children there?

**Yeah, thousands of children, running around going mad.**

Thank you.

**You're welcome.**

Did you make the banner or is the banner..?

**Er it's a good question - oh, that's Jules sitting with (inaudible).**

Aww, so sweet. Little yellow...

**She's just had a baby. Aww. We went to Jamaica - good well I'm glad I found that - I knew, I knew, I had a what was the book called?**

'On The Perimeter' by Caroline Blackwood.

**So yes, I had the word perimeter in my mind.**

You told me perimeter, so you had the title.

**Exactly. So she went first went to the protest camps in Greenham March '84. America magazine had asked me to write an article on the defeat of the women's British peace movement. Defeat? What does that mean?**

Yes.

**The women were described as being in the pay of the Soviet Union, and it was said many of them are Russian spies.**

Wow!

**Yeah, you should read this. It's really what it...**

That's fascinating.

**Greenham women have been adorned with such a wealth of unflattering descriptions that made one start to ask dizzying questions. Was it worse to be sex starved, or to be in the paper? (Laughs) Oh my god, she's got quite a good turn of phrase this woman! The claim of Auberon Waugh - fucking shitbag he is - that the Greenham women smelt of fish paste and bad oysters, also haunted me - for it had such distressing sexual associations. I wondered how much time he'd spent with him. I didn't think he would live near the Greenham common, but knew I could be very wrong about that. See how much vile calumny was directed at women, because they had the cheek to protest.**

To be visible, almost.

**Which is exactly what happened in your other area of research with women who said 'Could we please have the vote?'**

Absolutely. Yeah. These were horrible drawings of all sorts. Did you have any - did any of that sort of prejudiced, not prejudice, but that's prejudice, but did it affect the way at all that you perceived the camp before you went there?

**No.**

Or could you immediately see through that it was...

**No because I was very early visitor there. I mean, I think it got kind of more and more horrible. But I haven't read this for a very long time, so I don't remember much about it. This is chapter 7 'Started to contact some members of RAGE - what's RAGE about?'**

I think it might have said on the back what RAGE stood for, actually.

**Oh yeah, Ratepayers Against Greenham. (Laughs). Of-course!**

What else could it have been?!

Silly me! 'Said can I speak to the spokesman of rage, I asked her. This is a teenage voice. (Adopts Cockney voice) He's at a RAGE meeting. Said the girl proudly. I'm the spokesman of RAGE's daughter.' Ratepayers Against Greenham. So this may or may not tell you more about the - it is about this 'You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, said the British police - who grabbed us they watch supporters carrying chocolates and jam, Brillo pads to the women. The supporters were not ashamed of the cakes and candles that they bought to the camps. Their shame was different. They felt ashamed of their lack of courage, and their inability to make any personal sacrifice sacrifice to a cause they believed in. I watched an old white haired lady from Bristol arrive at the camps. This was the first time she'd been to Greenham, and when she saw the hideous conditions that women were living in, she burst into tears. I feel you're doing this for all of us. And she brought them some bread, which she had baked herself and had enriched it with molasses, because she thought it would be good for the health of women.' See, it's this kind of micro detail that absolutely flows through the um - err, what's it called the Suffrage movement, and this - there's so many individual instances of quietly women supporting themselves, which we do - having babies, we do. Trying to keep sane while you're married, you know? Yeah, if you don't have this book, come here and read it.

Thank you.

'Sit in front of the fire, she said when the squaddies - as the women called the RAF squadrons to defend the missiles, and had been so raw after Holloway, that she thought she'd go mad if these men wouldn't let her sleep'. So women were banged up in Holloway. Terrible.

Did you get a sense that there was that guilt - that she writes about - from the women who visited and couldn't stay?

**I didn't feel guilt.**

Did you feel it from anybody else?

**No, because I think there really was quite a distinct pattern of day trippers, of which I was one, and people who did the hard yards. And they were quite right to particularise it, because their effort was very considerably more than ours. Yeah.**

Let me ask you another stupid question, for the sake of hearing the answer! Which is, what was the purpose of visiting the site and not staying? Was it to boost the numbers, was it to bring things to the other women?

**No. You're absolutely barking up the wrong tree.**

Yes, tell me then.

**It was to cause chaos.**

To cause chaos?

**Yeah. And get every single television crew and newspaper and all the rest of it down to just keep banging drums, making a hell of a lot of noise, doing crazy things, you know, just taking massive risks all the time to just keep - it never went down at the knees. Because it was just going on all the time.**

And it felt risky when you were there?

**No. No, not in the slightest. No, it was a laugh. It was great fun. Making an awful lot of noise - it was fantastic. It was very, you know, the business with the children pinning all the things up, you know, I weep about it because I'm sentimental in memory about it. But at the time, the energy and the determination to wrest some power out of the male hegemony was just intoxicating. It was fantastic. So we did it!  
(Laughs).**

My um, my aunt - so on my mother's side - she was at Leeds while Greenham was happening, and she went and visited and she's um, she was doing music, and folk music in particular, and she went and clog danced right in front of the police to stop...

**See what I mean, chaos! It was about being crazy and making a lot of noise.**

Wooden clogs!

**Fantastic, good for her! Did she get filmed on the telly?**

She didn't, she didn't unfortunately.

**Be she was pissed off about that. I've got my bloody clogs on! What's the matter with ya?**

She's so funny - she hadn't mentioned this at all. And then she found - she just found a photo of her doing it that someone had taken. And then she also found all these pictures of her body painted, nude, running around the perimeter of the fence.

**She sounds incredible. So I'm very glad you told me that little mignon because when you said to me 'What was it like?', and I said it was mad, now you know!**

Yeah.

**From that little example. It was like we were all let out of boarding school to go completely bonkers for 24 hours or whatever. I want to know who this woman is.**

Shall I Google? See if it brings anything up?

**Caroline Blackwood, visited in March '94. Who is this woman?**

Does it give her a little biography in there?

**No, it doesn't.**

Sounds like she was American doesn't she?

**Was born and brought up in Ulster.**

Oh!

**Her novels include The Stepdaughter, for which was awarded the Higham prize. Great Granny Webster, which was shortlisted for the Booker - for crying out loud. The Fate of the Mary Rose, and most recently Corrigan.**

Oh this is Lady Caroline Blackwood. She's Lady, if I've got the right person.

**Oh right. How come - well, she hasn't got lady on the front page. Ulster!**

She's the brewery heiress of Maureen Guinness. If I've got the right person.

**Yeah, I'm sure it is. Caroline Black.**

Oh and she was painted by Lucien Freud as a child.

**Caroline Maureen Hamilton Temple Blackwood - triple barrelled name, good for you, our kid. Great. She writes quite well I think. I think you'd probably be able to get this in, in um The Bod, you know?**

Yeah, I'll have a look and see, 'cause they should. I've photographed it. I've written it down. There is absolutely no way I'm forgetting it.

**She talks to the women, to bystanders, shopkeepers and members of Ratepayers Against Greenham and camps. She witnessed the eviction, and sexual abuse of the women by the paratroopers. Oh my god.**

God.

**Trials in Newbury of woman who'd entered the base and the sudden arrival of the hunt at main gate. I didn't know about that, either. So all the locals in their red jackets, said 'Right, let's go and kick the arses of those bloody women, and gallop the horses through there - knock 'em over.' Great isn't it? What were the men like, you know, with the women marching in 1917? They were terrible. You ever seen the film of that woman throwing herself in front of the horse?**

Yes, yeah.

**Emily Davidson. Incredible.**

Yeah. And this is this is a horrible thing that I learned actually, quite recently, which is there was um, one time when they were protesting outside of of House of Commons. Um, the police were told we don't want to arrest them, because then we have to take them into prison and, you know - publicise...

**Then they start starving themselves.**

Exactly, exactly. So don't arrest them. And then things obviously escalated, because the women weren't being removed from the place. And they weren't...

**Yeah well they chained themselves to the fence.**

Exactly. Yes. Yeah. It got very violent - the policemen, or some of the policemen were tweaking the nipples of the women because they believed that it caused breast cancer. And so these women were being sort of sexually harassed this horrible...



**(Adopts cockney voice) 'Here you are darling, have a bit of cancer.'**

Literally, and they were lifting skirts, and really, you know, absolutely using their bodies against them. You know? Really awful. It's so terrible that however many years later, evidently...

**Well, this is '84. So, from 1914, let's say because the Suffragette movement started when?**

1906.

**Yeah, exactly. Yeah. So let's say 1914 to '84 - that's 70 years. Really grim, isn't it?**

Yeah. But at least we can take strength from the fact that both cases eventually succeeded in the aims that were set out.

**Yeah.**

And that's an empowering thought.

**Remember, remember, Tony Benn - however nice you think a left wing politician is, in the end they're not for us. I have never forgiven him for that. May he rot in hell. Because I loved him. It's like a lover, you know, when they let you down? You think, right. Because I believed in him.**

Betrayal?

**Yes. Absolute betrayal. He was very popular. He came to speak at LSE. He was, you know, he was much loved. He knew the risk he was taking. And he got slammed for it, which is what he deserved.**

What were you studying at LSE?

**A new - I think I might have been the second year - a new thing called Social Administration. So it was a composite degree, and it had four heads. And they were social history. Social administration, which is like um, the way in which government sets up delivery of services. Psychology and economics. And then I went on to do a social work - post grad social work thing, because you could just get straight in with it - it was really lucky. And then later on, much later on in life, I did a master's in law. So that was the end. I have no, no desire to do a doctorate. You've finished your masters haven't you?**

I finished my masters and...

**Well you know how incredibly difficult, I was working full time while doing my masters - doing the job that I was writing about.**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Yeah.**

I can't I cannot imagine working..

**I loved it. I absolutely loved it. It was jolly hard work. And I got 71% for my dissertation.**

Thank you very much.

**Thank you very much.**

Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

**I loved doing my masters. It was fantastic. I just - I hadn't really used my brain very much before then. I got into LSE quite easily. And, um, and then when I was 40, you know then I got down to doing some really good reading and thinking - it was fantastic. And designing a questionnaire, as you know, you know, it's great - I personally felt - you're too young, really, and you've been studying for so long, so it's a**

**continuum for you, but for me there was stud, woooooork, study. So I felt as if my brain (makes noise to suggest enlightenment), great - it was a fantastic feeling.**

I just feel so inspired.

**Oh, darling. Thank you. That's very sweet of you.**

No I do. It's been truly such a pleasure.

**Yeah. Oh, you're very welcome. Thanks for making me cry!**