

Illona Linthwaite

My name is Illona Linthwaite, and I'm an actress and a feminist. And...

Yay!

**And have been ever since I was a small girl - before I knew the word.
(Laughs).**

**Have you? Was that something that your mother spoke to you about?
Or is that something..?**

**No, no. But when I grew up, which was in the '50s, fathers had a very
different kind of place in the family. I mean, they were dominant, but
they weren't present.**

Oh, okay.

**And I grew up thinking that the whole marriage thing was ridiculous,
and I never liked boys as an adolescent. I can occasionally fell for them,
against my better judgment. But I didn't like them. I thought they were,
you know, not, not the best part of the species. (Laughs). And, and I
just, I, I formed some very earlier opinions about people's behaviour.
And it's interesting that here I am, I'm married and have been for a long
time, and I have a son and granddaughters. But as an adolescent, I was
really, I didn't think that was gonna happen to me. I thought no, no, I'm
gonna live my life totally solo and do what I want, when I want. Actually,
I have done that. I've lived how I wanted, really. So that's, that's okay.
Um, but it was a very strong urge in me. And also, I have very strong
feelings about class, and the unfairness of the world, and the injustice.
And because my dad was in the Air Force, how the English behaved
abroad - which I saw, first of all, as an 8 year old, and even then I was
clocking that I didn't like how white people were talking to what they
termed the natives. I found it ugly. So that was in Malaya.**

I was gonna ask where that was. Okay. So my, my history isn't the best.

Malaysia, as it's now called.

Malaysia. Okay. Okay. So that was, did you travel with your father then?

Yes. Yes, this was in in the '50s, which is when Malaya got their independence.

Okay.

But I found a lot of the behavior there really, really strange. And I started, started to judge and think about things, you know.

Yeah. Yeah. It's just interesting to - the reason I was like, oh, maybe it was your mother who kind of instilled that in you, I think that's a, for me, you know, my history of learning about feminism - my mum kind of taught me things when I was very small. So I just think it's really interesting that you as a kind of individual were seeing things and noticing things that perhaps even grown ups weren't?

Yes, I think, I think a lot came from my mother subliminally, actually. She would never - she wasn't a complaining woman. So she never complained about her lot. But I, I knew that she was highly intelligent. She went to university when it wasn't normal. And she was - she came from a very upper middle class family, and my father came from a very working class family, and they met in the Second World War, which is how unlikely people teamed up together. And I saw that she, she had done some fascinating work before she was married, she worked on cancer research, and so on and then she became a Wren during the war. And that's where she met my dad, of-course. And, but after that she became, she was, she was a mother and a wife. And I think, I suspect that was very frustrating. And I suspect she wanted to, to be a working - and she did, she did, she taught later on, but very much when

my brother and I were sort of off her hands, and we were at school and she had time to work, you know.

Yeah, it's just interesting to get a foundation, I suppose. And then kind of look at your time at Greenham and kind of what brought you to, to a place like that, that is also rejecting that kind of way of traditional, I suppose, way of living and a hierarchical patriarchal way of living, you know. You've got this amazing photo album here that you've opened up - sorry, I'm now just being distracted!

Well, this is the day of, this is on the Greenham common Sunday, the 11th of December '83. And I'm just going to enlarge this, because this poster says 'Bring mirrors to turn the base inside out, trees to plant, candles for silent vigil, and instruments for songs.' Well, I didn't bring an instrument because it would have to be a piano and that wasn't practical. But seeds and everything else, I'm gonna come round here - is this okay?

Yeah, of-course.

Just so that you can see. So this is, this is us kind of - this is really through the day. So this is us arriving.

So this is...

And the whole fence was surrounded. It wasn't that the Embrace the Base day, because that was earlier.

So this is, I think Reflect the Base?

Reflect the Base, exactly that.

I'm just seeing a whole line of women just around the base. It's so cool.

And I'm terribly ashamed that I look sort of smarter.

Is that you?

That's me. Yes. In my black coat - it's only I only look smart 'cause it's a black coat, but I had pink wellies on.

Oh yeah! They almost look like your legs, they are almost skin colored.

Um, and it was this particular day was extraordinary. Because if you know, you could go back on other days, which I did. And there were less, you know, there weren't so many people around, but the camps were always in place. And I really admired those women.

Were there loads of women when you first got there?

Yes.

Right.

Yeah.

And was that the first time you saw Greenham?

This was the first day ever. And so I mean, look, as the day - more and more people arrived.

Wow!

And that gives an idea because of the way - the lie of the land. Just how many.

It looks like a kind of mass migration.

And this was the beginning of the - when the fence was being cut.

Right. Did you partake in the fence cutting?

I didn't have bolt cutters. Did you see the picture of the bolt cutters?

Yeah, yeah I have.

But, I helped - once that was a hole, I helped.

Brilliant. Just cut it.

Yeah. Um. And then this was - that shows a little bit that all the trees were decorated with, with stuff.

What kind of things would be put in the trees?

Well, kids clothes, a lot of - very sort of kids clothes, bits of knitting, also woven into the fence.

Yeah.

In fact I think there's a picture over here with...

A great scrapbook, by the way.

There. These are the little kids close. In fact, I sent this picture to Rebecca, because she said her mother had taken her there when she was about 6 or 7 years old. So I sent this to her said 'Could this be you?'

That could be you, this tiny little girl. So are they lighting candles?

Yes. This was the vigil.

Right. Okay. And this happened at night?

And look, it just went right the way around.

Yeah, I can see lots of candles being lit up.

I don't have any particular action shots, which is a pity. It was extraordinary.

Yeah.

It was a completely wonderful day.

What was the feeling?

Um, kind of pride. And I often get it when I go on a march. You know, because it's just that feeling of the power that people have.

Yeah.

But I hadn't been on a completely female occasion before and I, and that was very, very exciting.

Yeah.

I loved it. I've got some pictures actually of the CND march. Oh, it's earlier.

I was gonna ask - so this absolutely wasn't your first experience with the CND?

Oh, no, no, no, no, no! (Laughs). So there's...

When did you become a part of the peace movement? I suppose is my question. When you were born!

I can't remember. I can't remember. But this this was also in '83, I think this was October '83.

So this is a CND rally, October '83.

These were all people I knew. My son - he came on all the marches. Poor blighter! All the marches, all the theatres, he was there.

How old is he there, do you think?

There, I would say about 7. That's my family. On a wonderful day for it as well, as you can see. And this was in Hyde Park where it sort of got because you know everyone sort of dissipated, and there were picnics and songs and speeches and so on. But, so that's, that's that really. I don't think there's any more to see to do with - I've got loads on my phone. Because I go on all the Equity marches. 'Cause I'm with my Southeast London Equity branch.

Yeah, yeah. What I love about just looking through a scrapbook like that is it could just be anyone's like family photos, but they're also so um political, I guess - obviously because of the context of what you're doing. But I don't know. I just love that kind of meshing of things. But when you were at - so when you were at Greenham, you already had children?

Yes. I had a son.

Cool. Yeah. And were you. You've said before that you were kind of back and forth at Greenham from the Reflect the Base time.

That was the first time. I don't know why I wasn't there in '82. Maybe I - oh, I think I was in Liverpool, at Liverpool Playhouse for a long time just before that. I think I was away quite a lot. But that was when I was very much back in London.. And could get involved all over again.

Yeah. So when you were first, were you there for just like that one big day?

That one big day, right into the night. I didn't stay the whole night. And I'm not sure we didn't come back the next day. Because in-fact, I think it was a whole weekend. And my sister in law who I went with, um, she lived quite near there. So she was - but she's been hopeless, I would

say, because she can't remember a thing. Actually, that's not true. That's not fair! (Laughs). But I've been asking her some questions about that day, she says 'I don't remember.'

But she was there?

She was there, very much so. Yes. And various friends,

I was going to ask did you to come with friends?

We went, yes, with some of the people in those pictures.

I can see people in those pictures.

Yeah, yeah.

And had they been before? Or was it all new for you?

I think one of them - one of them had been, I think one of them was quite a regular visitor. And then another person, who I emailed recently, who is being interviewed by your other team. She's been very much there. And she's somebody I usually meet at WOMAD! (Laughs). But she was there, and she would go and stay there for odd weekends. And move in. And she got imprisoned, so she's very interesting - I'm afraid I didn't get imprisoned. Sorry!

Don't be sorry! Do you do you feel like though, you should have been?

I sort of do. I sort of feel a bit guilty. And also they got - by the time I was there they had it really sewn up, because she was one of the - I think there was a - what do they call it a 'No name - the no name day' or something? Something to do with not stating your name.

Oh, yes.

So if you were arrested, they wouldn't find out who you were. And so you don't have a criminal record. Which was pretty canny, because you don't want to pick up one of those.

Were you ever on any actions where you were very close to people being arrested? You said your friend, was - were you there, or were you aware of that?

I saw people - when they, that got nasty later on in that day, and I saw people being um - unless it was the next day - I can't divide the days up until I find this bloody diary. Um, but yeah, it got quite aggressive later on, and verbally quite unpleasant. And I don't think all the police were like that, obviously they weren't. But when it got when it got difficult, and when there were so many women there, and so difficult to control, they'd deal with one bunch, and then there was a whole lot more arrived, you know?

Yeah. Yeah. But did you see any tactics being employed by the women to either make that more difficult for them, or evade them, or?

I know, there were tactics going on. Um. Yes, I mean, they were hopeless. They, they tied themselves up and chained themselves to the fence, and err, all kinds of - and they got into the base.

Oh, yeah.

Over the top, and then they got underneath. I didn't see this.

Underneath?

I think they dug down underneath, I think so.

Woah.

Because they thought if we can get over the top, we can go underneath. I think there was, but I - maybe I need to do my homework on that one, because I'm not sure.

I love the idea of that. I think I just love when I've seen like, footage or pictures or, or, or things that, you know, diaries even. There always seems to be some kind of sense of um, sense of humour about the situation, even if people are being arrested or - and I know, it's obviously an incredibly serious thing, but there is that kind of...

I think a lot of people had a great deal of fun. And, you know, human beings, such survivors, aren't we. So they got up, they got used to being cold, and wet, and covered in mud. But it was, I think the spirit of the thing was so strong, really, really strong. And it was my first experience of so many women all together, and I loved it. I thought it was really...

What did you love about that?

Well it felt, it felt very special. Err, I liked that feeling of sisterhood, and being connected to all these other women. And it felt, it felt very powerful. Um, and growing up when I did this was something quite new. And the feeling that actually women can change things. And I've always believed in protest, I think it's, you know, people sometimes say, well, what's the point, you can't change anything, I think, I think you can - I really believe you can. And um, it was very theatrical. That's the other thing! (Laughs). Without a doubt. And I love that. And it's - there was a sort of heightened sense of drama, and something happening, and doing something, and doing something against a very powerful enterprise. You know?

Yeah. When you say theatrical, because I agree with you, I feel like that too, and I think it attracted a lot of people as well who were involved in the arts and creativity. What, what for you about it, about Greenham in particular, was so theatrical?

Well being part of a group, so - like the theatre process and I think why a lot of people are attracted to the theatre is because you form a group of people. And it's, it's, it's almost like it's a blitz situation, because you're together with those people for a short time to produce a result. And here we were, we were together for whatever length of time to hopefully produce some kind of result. And I think it did, although I am appalled, I think I said this, this to you on the phone, I'm appalled that I've asked a couple of people, young women - probably your age - what, what they have heard about Greenham, and they haven't known, they haven't known about it, which really shocked me. Liam, who is this very brilliant IT guy who was here today, he wanted to know what, what all this was about. And I said 'Did you know about Greenham?' He said 'Well, I wasn't born', which he wasn't! Of-course, and you weren't, but, it was..

Why do you think that is - why is, for instance, this year, there's been a lot of - and last year there's been a lot of Suffragette talk - and Emmeline Pankhurst is a name everyone knows and remembers and celebrates. Why do you think this kind of peace movement at Greenham is not as well known?

Well, I think it - I think it lacks certain names that were the nucleus. I mean, the were, there was a nucleus of women. You know, you come across - I think Gillian Booth was one of them. You can come across the names again and again, but like, like you're saying, you know, Suffragettes, you immediately have a slew of names that one identifies with, and have gone down in history. And when you hear about the Greenham women, but you don't pick up specific names, and I think, possibly that. Also when the um, base did finally close, they never ever, ever said 'Yes, it's because of what the women did.' It was the men making a decision that it was now the time to close it. And you know, so I don't think it's been given credibility for, for the enormous amount that it's done for, for women, actually. And it's interesting that women are, I mean, not enough, but women are increasingly present in our - well, we've got a female prime minister for god's sake, and we had one then - neither of whom I like. But that says something. Women are much

more present on television, there are women presenters, and I mean, that's, that's all good. I'm not saying it's because of Greenham common, but that was the beginning, I think, of women realising their power, and the impact they could have. I mean, it wasn't popular with a lot of people. A lot of people really hated it, and hated them being there.

Who hated it the most?

Well, I don't know. I don't know. I think, I think the local people got very bored, I think, to begin with, I think they were enthusiastic. But I think after a while, they began to find it kind of tedious.

Did you ever have any run ins with local residents or..?

Well, I didn't, because I didn't stay there. I think the people who stayed there possibly did.

Because yeah, I've heard of some well, calling themselves vigilantes - I wouldn't really even describe them as that, but you know, hounding the women at night and things like that.

Yes. I think, I think that happened. Yeah. And I think there were, you know, and I think that was both sexes. I think it was men and sadly women who did that. Um. So you know, it took something to stay there. And right at the beginning when, when - because it was a march from Cardiff, wasn't it that began the whole thing. And I believe when- they had no idea what was going to happen when they got there. They didn't know how they'd be received. And I think after a while, they thought, oh, we'll pack up and go home because - and then all these letters began arriving from people over the country, and all over - all over all over the globe, saying what you're doing is amazing. And, and so they had to sort of rethink. Um.

(Edit in tape).

I'm just going to read you a poem.

I would love that.

By this lady, Wendy Pusat - this is a book I edited of poetry back in the '80s. And, and it sort of grew out of a theatre experience. And this is an Australian lady, and she wrote, she wrote two poems actually, which are - this is the Greenham, it's called Greenham Women. 'Rubbed up for winter snow, you have put your bodies where your hearts are - against the gates and under the wheels of war. Today, the missiles came to Greenham common, we saw it in the papers and wept for you. You are our elder sisters, making the time kindly to send us greeting as you beat against the storm. Like you, we sit on the doorstep of the world's end and will not look away. The people long to know something is indestructible. It may only be you.' And she, she wrote that - she was, I mean she was an activist in her own right. And then this is a poem which is about them fighting um, the same kind of situation there - a place surrounded by fences with machines and missiles inside. Um, so it's more of the same. And in here also I have poems by Pat Arrowsmith, and she was at every peace march there was, every CND march, and, er, I don't know if she was at Greenham, I mean she was quite a bit older then - I suppose I first came across her - well actually no only 10 years before, so I expect she was there. Um...

Just as you're talking about that woman, I had a flashback to an earlier question about you know why the Suffragettes are remembered, and them having more names and things, then I thought well, there are names at the CND - there are. But is it the, almost the very kind of ethos to not be a name, and not be a figurehead and actually, it's about the collective? Is that...

I think it was at Greenham common. But if you think I mean when, when I was - in the '70s, the, the Workers' Revolutionary Party was very dominant in England. And I was with a boyfriend who joined. And it was very, very full on. Um, and there are a lot of middle class people like myself, who um, joined this party and espoused the working persons cause. And I, I couldn't quite accept it. I really liked what they stood for.

Um, and people in that were very dominant, and one of them was Vanessa Redgrave.

Oh, yeah.

And she would hound people in Equity and say 'Are you coming along? We want to see you, and you've got to belong to the WRP.' And so there were names attached to that. And it wasn't certainly wasn't just women, it was men and women.

Yeah.

And I went to a lot of their meetings, which I'm - I found difficult because er, there were some lovely people. But um, at a certain point the slogans would start, and that kind of dialogue would take off. And I found, I found that a bit tricky because you stopped talking to people about ideas and things, and it seems to be a two way thing, and I don't like being lectured.

Yeah, yeah. Well, comparing that to Greenham, what was communication like there?

Um, well, it was it was very different, really. Um, I never felt - I never felt that sense of oneness or belonging, that I felt at Greenham common. I mean, it was political in a very different way. It wasn't espousing the women's place in society, particularly, it was very much the Workers' Revolutionary Party, you know? So it had a different kind of feel to it. But it was - my then boyfriend was very ardent, and you know, and wanted me to join and I said 'I, I'm not just going to join because you're a member of this. I will come to the meetings, I will support you, I believe in what they say - I'm not going to join because I'm feeling harassed and bullied.' Which I didn't feel at Greenham - I felt, I felt myself and I felt independent. And I felt an individual still.

When you, when you first got there - I'm always interested in this - did you, how did you know who to look to? Was there someone, obviously organising things? Did you just turn up and follow people?

Well, we, we were, I think assigned to the Yellow Gate.

The Yellow Gate, okay.

Which was a very dominant gate. And also it was a breakaway gate, because they, they continued as a force, I think after Greenham had finished, and had their own political agenda. And so, as a visitor that was certainly the place that I made - for we made on that particular day. But I did go to other ones.

Oh did you? Which?

The Blue Gate, I think. But they, they all had, and I don't know enough about this to to say, but they all had their different sort of agendas and approaches to things.

Yeah. Did it feel - the - when you moved for instance, into Blue Gate, did you feel that for yourself? There was a different energy or it was different kind of space? Or...

Yes, I think so. I think so. I wish I could remember details much more clearly, than I probably am.

I'm interested in this, because, because obviously there are lots of details that change over time with memory, and memory is fallible and all those kind of things. But do you talk about Greenham much in general, like before this interview was arranged, for example? Is it kind of feature in the conversation of your life?

It does, but it doesn't go anywhere unless somebody else has been there.

Right. Interesting.

Or, like you, they have a particular reason for talking to me about it. So It's not It's not something that flows around the table, necessarily.

Right. Why do you think that is?

Um. I don't know. I'm not sure. I think, as I say, some people don't know enough about it. And if they haven't been there, they feel either guilty that they weren't there, or they, they are a bit misogynist in their reaction. You know, I think that's occasionally happened.

Do you think um, there's been any influence by the media on the perception of Greenham?

Oh, yes. Yes. And I think, I think I mean, I think they will probably very clever a lot of the time in using the media.

Oh, right. Okay.

I think they were probably, and they had their, they would know, which newspaper was going to be responsive, and which weren't. And I think it's probably quite likely that papers like The Mail and The Express were probably not very helpful. Again, I don't know precisely. But, but, but...

But at the time, you know, general kind of news media and, and things - do you remember the general perception or the, I suppose, like the narrative that was put on the Greenham women? Was there a particular perception of them?

I think it went two ways. I think it paralleled. I think there was a lot of admiration, and then a lot of I could only describe as a sort of patriarchal response. (Laughs). Like silly women.

Right.

But only, I think that that kind of response was to be dismissed, because it's just pathetic. So I didn't take much notice of that.

Yeah. Yeah. I'm just wondering if you ran into anyone at the time, going back and forth, as you did - I'm wondering if you ran into anyone who kind of, you know, believed what they read, and you know?

I don't remember that. Sorry.

No, that's fine.

To be honest.

Because I was interested in this kind of two lives that you're kind of living by kind of going to Greenham, and it works in such a different way. And then kind of returning to normality, I suppose, and what that does.

It put me on a certain path, I tell you. I think it, it was - I don't call it life changing because I'd been sort of tripping along that path for - since I was a small girl. But it certainly established something about women, and what what we were capable of, without a doubt. And there were some wonderful women there, there were some pretty fucking terrifying women there as well! Bloody hell yeah ooh! (Laughs).

(Laughs). Were you, did you meet anyone that surprised you? Like maybe someone you were scared off and then got to know more? Or vice versa?

I don't think I was there long enough. I think I needed to stay there for that to happen. But um, no, the the the woman that - you just you need to be with somebody for a while, don't you - and the woman who really scared me, as I said, when I met her was Pat Arrowsmith. Completely freaked me out. (Laughs). And then, then I realised, yeah, I mean, I knew she was a good 'un because of what she's done. And because of her actions, and my god, she was in prison eleven times. And didn't try and hide her, who she was either. I mean, that was a badge of pride, I

think for her. But she was, she was a bit daunting. I always felt I can't quite match up - whatever I've done in my life, it doesn't touch what this woman has done.

Was, was that the feeling that you had potentially with some of the other Greenham women?

Yes, it was. When I looked at some of those women in their tents and sitting outside the tents and realising they've been there all night, and it was fucking cold. I thought, um, okay, they're doing stuff I wasn't prepared to do.

How do you feel now talking about...

I wish I'd stayed.

Really?

I wish I'd stayed for a few nights - seen a night through.

Yeah. What was the decision at the time? Because there could be loads - a million reasons why you why you didn't stay. But was there a specific one for you at the time?

Well, I think I just went home to my family.

Yeah.

To my son, you know?

Yeah, of course. Yeah.

I mean, I had a husband, who certainly looked after him when - and I'd left him while I went working. So it wasn't, it wasn't just that at all. That would be hypocritical to say that was it. But I, I just think I wasn't quite prepared to, to go that far. But now, I wish I had. (Laughs).

Why do you wish you had, though?

Well, a) I could ask some of your own questions with more clarity. And b) I'd have liked to have had the experience of just living there for a while. I mean, that would that would have been very rare. But you don't, you don't, I mean, I knew it was a rare thing to be there. But you don't realise just quite how extraordinary it is 'til later.

Um. So has your opinion of it changed over time, then? Or gotten stronger, or?

No, I see it very much as a beacon in my life. As something very important.

Yeah.

And very, very strong. And very emotional. I don't know if that was er, something that put certain people off that it was emotional. I mean, inevitably, it was emotional. You hear people singing like that, and ululating, and lighting candles. It's very extraordinary. And you have a great sense of harmony with other people. It's the nearest I get to feeling religious - that kind of feeling. (Laughs).

That's interesting. Yeah. Did you have any kind of spiritual practice at the time? Or?

In a religious sense?

Yeah. Was there any kind of, I don't know, rituals, or meditations or things that you...

Well, I, I, I'm not religious, but I certainly have a great belief in the natural powers of our planet. Which I feel are being eroded. Um. So like for example, in the spring, and I haven't done it yet, actually, I like to go out and stand with my bare feet in the grass for the first time each

year - and things like that. So in that sense, I found being there very, very strong because it was in a very natural - well, it wasn't natural, it's not a natural world to be round a base full of 96 cruise missiles.

Yeah.

That's not natural, but the world around it was, was beautiful. And, to think, I mean, it's amazing, the place was amazing because it was once Greenham Common belonging to the people - before it was sold off. Which is, you know, was terrible.

Yeah. It feels like an invasion of - because not only I mean, I've heard it described as almost being an invasion of the country by you know, American US, but also invasion of nature.

Yes. Absolutely. And er, I what I didn't realise because I - one thing I didn't, I didn't know how long Greenham Common had belonged to a - not to the people, and it was actually sold off I think in the '30s by the local corporation or council, whatever it was - to the MOD. And then I think it first of all, it became an RAF base. And then later on the Americans took it over as their missile base.

Do you remember first thinking about that, and how you felt?

Well, that, it wasn't just Greenham Common that made me think that - I mean, everyone was terrified of any kind of nuclear happening at that time. It was very much in people's consciousness.

Yes.

You know, but I, I don't remember feeling particularly frightened. But I was - I felt that - I was very conscious of it, because of the peace marches and so on, so it was certainly wasn't new to me to be a protester.

No. The general feeling of nuclear weapons being so in people's consciousness back then, how do you think that compares to today?

Well, it - I think all our focus was on one thing then. Um, one terrifying and potentially utterly destructive thing. But now one's focus is sort of 360 degrees all around the world because there is so much that is crazy and wrong. You know, if you're protesting - I hardly know where to begin protesting now, actually. Because there is just so much to deal with.

(Edit in tape).

I want to play you this song.

Yeah. Okay. So we've got a song - what, what is this song? Is this your song?

No, it's not my song. Not my song. I mean - there are lots of rounds like (sings) 'We are women. We are women.' That's one, that's a round. And then there's the ten green bottles one. Oh, yes. (Sings to tune of Ten Green Bottles) 'No cruise missiles wanted here today. No cruise missiles wanted here today. 'Cause if one cruise missile should accidentally stray, there'd be no more people left around to say', and it goes on. And there's there's different lines like (sings) 'Because if one man General decides to disobey, because if one subject nation should try to break away' blah, blah, blah.

I love it.

But this one, this one, I just think - and I couldn't remember this one properly. Um, and it's I think it's in that songbook.

**(Sound of recorded song. Women sing, and men try to interrupt).
'Which side are you on? Are you on the side of genocide?' Then you get the men's voices. 'Which side are you on, I ask you, which side are you on? Which side are you on? Are you on the other side from us?**

Which side are you on? I ask you - are you on the side or racial strife? Are you on the side that beats your wife? Are you on the side that don't like life? Which side are you on, I ask you? Which side are you on? Which side are you on? Are you on the other side from us, which side are you on? I ask you, are you on the side of the National Front? Are you on the side that likes to hunt? Are you on the side that calls us cunts? Which side are you on, I ask you? Which side are you on? Which side are you on? Are you on the other side from us, which side are you on? I ask you which side are you on? Which side are you on? Are you on the other side from us, which side are you on? Are you on the side of death, or are you on the side of life? That's the only decision you have to make.'

That's great.

Isn't that an amazing song?

Yeah. I love that because it's, um, you can literally hear how it's being used, you know. These aren't just songs that these women are writing because they're bored. You know, they have a message and they really try to communicate something to these men who are just trying to get rid of them basically.

And I really like it because the men's voices are there.

Yeah. Yeah. How long would the singing sessions go on for?

They'd blow up - they'd kind of come, and then they fizzle out. And then suddenly somebody will take up a song and off they'd go.

(Edit in tape).

If there is kind of moment, or picture or something for you, that sums up Greenham?

It was, it was at dusk really, I think. Sounds a bit sentimental, but as it got darker and everyone lit candles, which is frightfully sentimental, I think, but I just kind of finished me. I found it, I found it very intense.

Just the darkness coming?

The darkness. And I was also aware, because of some of the, some of these women that they certainly weren't all likable, why would they be? And that, you know, living this would, would probably be very difficult. Not necessarily. I mean, I think it was clear that some women really kind of took to it, and enjoyed it. And then I think some women stayed there and found it difficult. And that's admirable.

Yeah.

And some women had small children as well. I mean, little ones.

How did you feel as a mother

About them?

Yeah.

Well, I suppose each - I mean, if there's an extended family around, then I feel alright. And now I know that - and watching my granddaughters grow up - that what your parents do is very important, and it's not just having them around the whole time. I think - I think you, you admire what they do. And I think that's, that's inspirational. So I think maybe, you know, they'd miss their mother, but I think also, finally, they would say that 'That's fantastic my mum did that.' You know,

Yeah. Is your - are your children, or your grandchildren - I don't know how old they are - probably not old enough to be involved in activism yet, but...

Don't you believe it! The 13 year old is a big feminist.

Good. Excellent.

And she won't allow - not so much me - but she certainly won't allow my husband to get away with anything.

Oh brilliant.

She's always 'Right. Let's have an argument. What...' She's great. They both are - the little one, the 11 year, old plays football.

So they're both girls.

Yeah. Yeah. Which I think is wonderful one. The feminist dances actually. So she's got these two sides to her.

Yeah, well you know. Why not?

Why not?

We need feminists dancers. We need feminist everything, don't we. Yeah. That's great. Because, I like that question of those, you know, activism being passed down. Whether your own children, who went on these CND marches, for example, you know, have been involved in anything?

Well, yes. But interestingly, my son's generation - he's in his 40s now - when he was a student, I don't - there weren't marches - the students did not go on marches then. And I don't remember there being an angry group of younger people then particularly, and now it's very different again.

Yeah. So would he have been at uni in the '90s.

Yes, he went to he went to Cambridge when - in '91.

Oh, okay. Yeah. Yeah, you're right. I, I don't nothing's coming to my head have any kind of um...Yeah.

No bit later, '93, I think.

Yeah. Interesting.

And he certainly didn't go into the theatre. So maybe - and because when he grew up, he did go on all the marches as a little boy, as you saw. And he did come to all the theaters and even came away to Rep with me. So maybe he feels he's done his bit. (Laughs). He's not, he's certainly not disinterested now. He's very, he would be very committed. In-fact he went up - there was a women's march he took his kids on.

Oh, yeah, the Women's March.

So he went - well, I was on that too. But we didn't kind of manage to meet up. They loved it! 'Oh we've learned some new swear words!' (Laughs).

I think it's a really interesting time for feminism, you know, people talked about it with this social media explosion and having the Women's March. It was all happening on Facebook.

It was brilliant, wasn't it?

Amazing. But what I find amazing about - coming back to Greenham is the fact that this is a time without social media, without mobile phones, and the organisation of that mass group of women - both Embrace the Base, Reflect the Base, and some of the other actions as well. Amazing.

Yes, it was extraordinary. Quite extraordinary. It was like, I don't, I don't know how they managed it. There was always someone with access to a landline somewhere.

Yeah. And you'd have to rely on those messengers. Like how does it feel today talking to me about Greenham?

Well, actually, it's, it's really made me think about it. Um. But also, I think what - I got quite nervous about having this interview, because I'm, I get very irritated when women are vague and blather on. And I didn't want to be vague and blather on. And I guess I've been both vague and blathered on. (Laughs).

if you have, we've been vague and blathered on together! I wouldn't worry about that! (Laughs). So what was what was the worry about being vague?

Well simply a memory thing. That I couldn't be precise about the memories, and I'm sure that time was full of little episodes. And that's why I was so incensed I couldn't - I even went into the loft this morning to try and find this diary. Um. As I always write things up, so that really annoyed me.

But that's the wonderful, weird thing about memory, isn't it? Actually, in a way, whatever happened is kind of what we remember. And we remember whatever happened. And they kind of work together. Do you know what I mean by that? And I think time does affect how we see things. And that's why I'm interested in, you know, how it is to talk about it today. And yeah, what is what is the feeling of that, I suppose?

I remember the mud.

(Laughs).

My god, it was muddy.

(Laughs). You had your pink wellies on.

I had my pink wellies on.

They looked so clean in that photo, I can't imagine how...

They did, that's an early one.

Yeah, it was early in the day! Oh!

I was very proud of my pink wellies for some reason.

There's one question that we're asking everyone. So I'm going to be very specific and read it off the paper. Could you explain why you think it's important Greenham is remembered by subsequent generations?

I think it's very important simply because of what it was, and what it represented, and how it showed that the power of women, and also how er something like that can change people's lives. Because I think people's lives were changed by, by that. And by being there. It probably wrecked a few marriages. I don't know about that. But I think, I think it certainly put a strain on marriages, but I think women found a singular voice together. I think that's terribly important. And I think, I think, I think the whole kind of feeling for women has changed from around that time. And I think possibly Greenham had something to do with it.

Yeah.

Yeah, I think women ought to hang on to that.