

Jenny Craigen

So, I guess the important thing about the project is why do you think it is important that we remember Greenham for subsequent generations, or anyone, really?

Um, I think it was a very powerful and successful um, protest. And I think it's been much overlooked. It's almost like it's old news now. But I think the people who have cast it aside as old news don't realise how very significant um, it was. Um. A few years ago, just before he died, I went to one of those Evenings With Tony Benn. And I wouldn't normally go to those sorts of things, but he was my absolute hero. And it was just here at the local theatre in Taunton and he was interviewed by somebody about his life and everything that he'd done. And then the second half was a Q&A. And I put my hand up and said 'How influential do you think the Greenham women were in ridding Greenham common of nuclear weapons?' And he kind of hedged a bit, and then he said 'Were you at Greenham, my dear?' And I said 'Yes, I was.' And he said 'And did you serve time at Her Majesty's pleasure?' And I said 'Yes, I did.' And there was kind of thunderous applause around the auditorium, which was really very embarrassing. And then he said 'I think, the Greenham women were very, very influential, and their protests and their actions were very creative and kept the issue in the public awareness, and how they persevered, how they persisted in their protest, and until 1987 when the bombs went away.' So I do feel it was very significant. And I was a bit shocked a couple of years ago, I went to an exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, I thought I'd never set a foot in a place like that, but they had an exhibition about protest, peace protests, and it was a very well curated exhibition, except I saw the section on Greenham was woefully inadequate. Just very, very token. And er, so when I heard that Greenham Women Everywhere were going to put together this archive, I thought good, good.

Why do you think there was such a sort of lack of information about Greenham?

At the time, or since?

I mean at The Imperial War Museum, do you think there's a reason that they didn't cover it more fully?

I don't know, I have my own cynical suspicions like that it was probably curated mainly by men. Um. And yes, I mean, it focused on protests throughout the ages. And some of them I knew nothing about and was very interested to hear about, but the, the section on Greenham was just very small, and they obviously thought they were being very clever because they put up a piece of fence as a sort of room divider in the section of the museum. But it was inaccurate, it was the wrong kind of wire, and it just felt very token, and a few little ribbons attached to it and things, and when I think of the extent of the protest, and the creativity of the actions it just didn't represent it really.

Just a complete lack of consciousness that it was so significant?

Yes, yeah. Yeah. So.

And what got you involved in Greenham in the first place?

Err, well, we're talking 1982. And I had just come out, rather late, as a lesbian, and wanting to surround myself with books and music and everything to do with er, women loving women and various other women's issues. And I went to a bookshop - I lived in London at that time - and I went to a bookshop called Silver Moon, and I saw a poster on the wall saying 'Come and embrace the base.' And I'm ashamed to say I didn't know anything about Greenham at that time. Although the women had been there for at least a year. Um, and so I went to Embrace the Base - a lot of my friends were going, and they were going with groups on coaches and things, which I wanted to do but my then first girlfriend didn't want to go on a coach, and wanted to go separately. And so we arrived at Greenham on that - I think it was a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, freezing cold. And um, once we got there, we didn't

know where the fence was, or the gates were. And every policeman we asked the way was singularly unhelpful. So it took us quite a long time to get to the fence and the gate. And um, I was constantly looking out for my other friends, which annoyed my girlfriend. Um, and I just - I felt I'd found my tribe. You know, this was my cause. And this was my tribe. And I felt so involved. And she was so anti, and just couldn't cope with the crowds and whatever. I mean, it was a very, very big demonstration. And I think um, the press reports of um, 30,000 women are probably woefully short of the mark. Um. But it was so exciting to be part of that action where we did link arms around the fence and we made the whole 9 mile perimeter. And that moment when the camp women who had organised it were communicating on walkie talkies, and, you know, they obviously got to the point where, yeah 'We're joined up here, we're joined up here, we're joined up here', and then there was this great 'Whooooop' of celebration. And my girlfriend then said 'Right. We can go home now, can't we?' And I said 'No, no, I want to stay.' And you know, people were lighting little fires by the fence and putting out candles and things, and singing songs. And I so much wanted to be part of it. But I got torn away by her. And on the journey home, I said 'I'm going to become more involved, I'm going to find a local group and get to Greenham as often as I can.' And she said 'Well, it's going to be Greenham or me.' So I chose Greenham! (Laughs).

Wow!

And that was that was the beginning of it. I mean, this was just a very first tentative relationship. But once I got to Greenham I fell in love every 5 minutes, because it was very much, well a women's space and yeah, largely lesbian space.

Yeah. So your experience was that it was largely lesbian?

Um, yes. As far as I know. I mean, how do you know? But once I got back to London, I did join up with a local group. I was living in Camden, and the group was called, initially, Camden Women Against Cruise. And we later became Camden Greenham Women. And we used to

meet weekly and plan trips to Greenham, and find out ways that we could support. There was also a London Greenham office and I used to go to meetings there, where they sort of coordinated the local groups and gave us information about the actions and things. And from that point, um, I was there almost every weekend, and a lot of holidays too. I was teaching, so I had long holidays. I had a slight bit of a dichotomy, really, because I saw myself as a career teacher, and I was working towards headship. I was a deputy head at that time, and a bit of a conflict that if I got into trouble, um, you know that would threaten my career. Um. But it didn't really at any time, until I went to prison. But no, I was involved in quite a lot of the big actions - do you want me to talk about those?

I would love to hear about them if you'd like to talk about them?

Okay. Well one of them, which was just a very gentle action but I, I really really threw myself into it. I think it was June - I'd first gone to Greenham in December '82. The women had been there a year. And in June '83 um, they held a dragon festival, and we were invited through our groups to um - each woman to produce a meter square piece of fabric on which they'd written, or painted, or stuck things on or whatever, to represent their feelings about the peace protest. And then at the dragon festival we met - I don't know at Greenham it always seemed to be either pissing with rain, or a freezing cold, or blisteringly hot. And this was a blistering hot weekend, and we all sat around in the sun and got badly burnt, and stitched together our bits of Dragon, this was to be the Greenham dragon. And then this - I'd sort of aligned myself to Orange Gate, and the Orange Gate people had then been joined up with the next gate and so on. And by the evening, we had a 9 mile length of fabric! Isn't that just unbelievable?

That's amazing!

And it had come from all over the world. I mean, some women had come from other countries to deliver, some people have sent them or gotten them there somewhere, but there was a 9 mile length of fabric,

and so we danced all around the base with this dragon. And of-course it was very, um, very visual. So there was quite a lot of photographic evidence of that afterwards. So that was just a very, very gentle action.

Yeah.

What other actions do I remember? I remember something called the bus action. I don't know if you've heard about that?

I haven't heard of this one, no.

Well, a couple of women from Orange Gate who just - I need to say a little bit about, I mean, there were the camp women who lived there, who had given up their homes, who left their families and their husbands or their children, whatever. Somebody once said 'Men leave home for war, and we've left home for peace.' And um, it was evident to me that they had some thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the project and given up a lot, and were living in horrible conditions, and were treated very badly by the MOD, the local vigilantes, the squaddies, and so on. And then there was us, the visitors. Now, I kind of battled against that distinction for a long, long time. And I remember Rebecca Johnson, who was um, a camp woman, and very vocal and very active - I remember having a conversation with her where she said 'There is this thing, like a hierarchy of sacrifice.' And she said 'And I really don't want it to be like that, because everybody, every woman does what she can.' And so that I felt that very validating because, again, I had this conflict, you know, shall I go ahead and become the head teacher that I want to be, or do I give it all up and come and live in the mud? You know. Anyway, there were, there were two women who, like me were visitors. And one of them was in the motor trade. And she (cat approaches!) - no you get away from those please. Sorry, that's on your tape now.

That's alright.

A cat trying to get the biscuits!

Cats are allowed into our interviews, that's fine!

Um, anyway, anyway, no more - you're not having the biscuits. Um, she was in the motor trade and she had access to the biggest bunch of keys you've ever seen, which would open and start any motorised vehicle.

Sounds amazing!

So she brought these along. And the action that was planned was that we would go into the base in the dead of night, and she would steal about a bus.

It's like a superpower being able to open and start any vehicle!

Yes, she would steal a bus, and we would meet at some point and climb on the bus. And I am not quite sure what was planned after that. But we were certainly going to drive around the base shouting 'Look, we're here, you can't keep us out!' - that sort of thing. And um, so we were all in sort of little cells, groups of people that were going to meet the bus at certain places. Anyway, I missed the bus! (Laughs). Which was terrible. I got terribly, terribly lost with a bunch of women. And it was very funny and very frightening, because I'm extremely frightened of dogs. And of course, the big police dogs were horrendous. Um, so we're sort of creeping through the undergrowth, trying to find our bus stop. And, you know, we knew that they were MOD police around with torches and dogs and things. It was very, very scary. But anyway, I missed the bus. So I wasn't actually part of the action in the end, but um, people were, and people went to jail for it.

Gosh. Do you think the combination of sort of fear and humour is something that happened a lot?

A tremendous amount - it had to because, you know, some aspects of it were very frightening and very dark. And the lightness and the humour kept people going. I saw it, just to go back to this kind of hierarchy of sacrifice. Um, I was so keen to um, dissuade the camp women that you

know, we were just part timers or whatever. And because I was quite a high earner, I spent a tremendous amount of money. Every weekend I would go down with a loaded car full of food and alcohol - always welcome. But also more practical things like frying pan and saucepans, wood for the fire, large plastic containers to store food in and things. And I was really, really happy to do that, and to make that practical contribution. Um. And then it was very disheartening to go down the following weekend and find that the camp, that bit of the camp had been evicted, and possessions seized, and all the things I'd brought the previous weekend had gone in the muncher, and that was very disheartening. But I wasn't going to be dissuaded, just as as the women who carried on living there. Um, the blockades, the blockades before, the missiles arrived, I think in late '83, and there were a number of blockades - there were usually daytime blockades of the gate where the construction workers would go in. So every half term and holiday I was down there wanting to be part of the blockade. And that was, that was very exciting because if you're blockading a gate, you are in a very big group of women. And you have that sort of support of each other. But I do remember being very terrified - I'm also terrified of horses, and, um, you know, police horses stepping between the bodies on the ground. And I didn't know that they'd been trained not to step on a body. So that felt very sort of threatening to me. Um. My, I suppose the biggest action that I was part of was the No Name action. I don't know if you know about it?

I have read a bit about it.

Um, I was involved with my friend Sue on that. And it was after that action that I did actually goes to jail for a week. And I've written a play about it, which you're welcome to take away or tell the rest of the group perhaps - I don't if it's interesting as part of the archive?

I'm certainly it is.

It's a 45 minute play written for radio, but it could equally be adapted and become TV or stage. And it was the focus, really, it starts with that

Tony Benn encounter, in the theatre. I mean what was embarrassing about that, was I was still working - I was a head teacher in a school, and I imagine that there were other people in the audience who, who, who I knew. Um, and I thought, oh, do I want to expose myself like this? But the next next week in the local paper, there was 'Tony Benn and Greenham woman are reunited', which was a complete nonsense, I'd never met him before in my life.

(Cat gets evicted from interview).

Yeah, so the No Name action was fantastic to be part of because it was so huge. And it was very, very well planned. And we had meetings at the London office, and meetings at our Camden meeting place. And women from the camp had come to say 'If you do this action, you're likely to be arrested, and you're likely to get a custodial sentence. So you must be prepared for that. And so only go ahead with it if you're prepared to do that.' And fortunately, it was at the beginning of half term week, so I had no issue with the time as long as the custodial sentence wasn't longer than a week.

Oh really?

Anyway, we did the action. Um, parts of it were very exciting, very funny. Lots and lots of singing. Parts of it were terrifying, and actually going to court and then going to jail in - I was in Styal in Cheshire, which felt a very long way away. And I suppose the main thrust of my play is the experience of a southern softie like myself, middle class professional southern softie - the experience I had in a northern working class environment of a jail, and how I handled that.

Do you want to talk about that?

Yes, I'll gladly talk about it. I mean, I feel quite proud, really. But the thing that I enjoyed about the action was that it was so huge - 400 of us went in at the same time. Um, and I loved the chaos and confusion we caused, and how these police were just running around like headless

chickens. And um, they had numbers on their uniforms and some of them had badges. But to them, we all looked exactly the same. So they found it very, very hard to identify people. And the cardinal rule of the action was that you would not give your name. So we made it harder for them by constantly changing clothes, and changing shoes and things so they didn't know who they arrested or whatever.

Oh, wow!

And then we went from there to - I was in custody in Reading, Reading jail. And it was a bank holiday weekend. So we were held on remand in Reading jail. And that was okay, because you were always with at least one other person in the cell, sometimes three or four of us, although they changed it around a bit. And we found ways of making it okay. It got to be scary when they had a special court on the Monday. And we went to Newbury, and the carpark of the Newbury courthouse was absolutely full of police vans of women who had been brought from Oxford and Cowley, and Reading, Swindon all over the place - because we'd filled the police stations and jails in the whole of the Home Counties. And they couldn't have us all in the court, so we had to sit in our minibus from - with the people that we'd been in, on remand with. And then we saw other women coming out of the court. And they were shouting messages like saying - they had been sent down - but they were saying 'We're going to jail. And it's only a week.' So at that point, I knew I could do this. I've got a week, I can do that. But then it did become quite scary. In the court, three women magistrates. Um. Very, very cold and frosty. And in the witness box, we had decided in our van that we were not going to speak at all. So we didn't even confirm - I mean, they didn't have names for us, anyway, we were just numbers. But we didn't speak at all, and in the end the chief magistrate said 'I assume from your muted manners, that you're not going to pay this fine?' It was only a £25 fine. Number of women at that time who couldn't go ahead with it for reasons of their own just said 'Okay, I'll pay the fine.' But I decided to, to go with it. Went back to Reading, stayed there that night, most of the next day, and then a bizarre experience where you're sitting in the cell - er, by that time we were convicted. So,

up until that time, we've had no blankets, no pillows, disgusting food, but that carried on. Um. But because we were now convicted, we could have blankets and pillows. So that last night in Reading, we had blankets and pillows, and that was okay. But then the next day, you heard screws coming down the corridor saying 'Ten for Holloway.' And you're sitting there thinking, Ooh, I hope they choose Holloway because that's near home, and I'll be able to get home easily from there. And I didn't get chosen for Holloway, and then three for Durham - my friend Sue went to Durham, and then ten for Styal. And they came and sort of picked you off, and you got into one of these great big meat safe wagons and um, I thought Styal, I don't know where the fuck that is, where are they sending me? (Laughs).

For the record, where is Styal?

It's actually quite near Manchester, it's up in Cheshire, but that felt like a very, very long way from home. I get terribly travel sick. I also had really, really bad period pains. So I was really worried about traveling all this way to god knows where in this van, and it was so, so hot. Again Greenham is, you know that my memories are extreme weather conditions - it was never just oh, it was quite a nice day. So we went to Milton Keynes, first of all, and that was clearly for a break for the screws in the bath - in the truck because we didn't get any lunch, we were allowed to go to the loo we were allowed to be given water. And I was saying to people with me 'Are we there? Are we nearly there?' - just like a frightened child, you know, 'Are we knew nearly there, Daddy?' 'No, we've got bloody miles to go!' And so we carried on up to Styal in these, I mean it's like sitting in a meat safe, it really is. It's a hard metal bench. And then there's a hard metal door here, and a triangular window, and behind you a slightly bigger window, but you know, I'm quite a big person - I couldn't really even turn around properly. Anyway, we arrived at Styal at about 8/8.30 in the evening. And that's when I started to get really frightened because it's a semi open prison, and a lot of the women live in these big red brick houses. I think it's an old barracks, army barracks or something. And as we came up the drive in this big truck which said Thames Valley Police, you know, they were opening their

windows and leaning out the windows saying 'Oh god more of them Greenham cunts, don't bring them here. They've all got lice. We don't want them, we don't...'. And I thought ooh, this is the environment I've invited myself to for the next week. Um. Anyway, when, then they took us one by one of this truck to process us. And I knew there were ten of us on there. And I was in the last two, and a voice said 'There's no room, there's no room, you're gonna have to take them back to Reading.' And I thought, god, I've got to go back this journey, and I've got these period pains and I was feeling sick and whatever. Anyway, they decided to send us not to the same area of the prison, but to something they called the muppet house, which was one of these red brick buildings. And um, me and this other woman, Helen, who I hadn't known up to that point, we were sent there. Um, grim processing - strip search, not internal search, but might as well have done - it was so demeaning. Given a little cotton nightie with a frilly collar. And we were in solitary confinement, but within this house, so we had, we did quite well really because we had a room as such. And it was a room with um, a metal framed bed, screwed to the floor in the middle of the room, but I had a window and I could see out. Er, and the rest of the furniture was very, very inventive. It was made out of corrugated cardboard, so you couldn't hurt yourself with it, or bash the place up, a little cupboard or whatever. Um, anyway, I was there for a week. And I decided, and it wasn't actually something - it wasn't a strategy that I seemed to put together for myself, but I knew I wanted to confound them by, by challenging the stereotype of the typical Greenham and woman. And, you know there'd been awful, awful press about how badly behaved the women were, how lippy they were and foul mouthed and things. And I decided that I was going to be super polite. And so, the screws - it was wonderful to see the looks on their faces, because they were completely confounded - 'Who is this woman? She is being so polite and nice.' And I would say things like 'Please tell whoever made that porridge, it was absolutely delicious. It was just like I would have made it at home'. So yeah, we actually had 4 days in those individual rooms - extremely hot weather, flinging open the window, chucking out bits of toast. I felt like the bag - the bird woman of Alcatraz, you know. Um, so we were in solitary confinement,

but I never felt like I was on my own because they wouldn't leave me alone, they were so determined to find out who I was.

Wow!

And so there was a sort of chain of people to come and talk to me about who I was. And I wasn't, I wasn't gonna tell them, you know, and when you first get into prison, you get given a booklet, which is called on 'On Coming into Prison'. And it's the first thing that happened is you'll be photographed and fingerprinted - never happened. They didn't have a name to put to those prints or, or photographs. So, but they were determined, and I had the chief, I don't know what do they call them - the head, head of the prison, the governor, and the deputy governor, I have three vicars of different faiths came to talk to me, and I just thought I wish you would just go away. And I'd befriended one of the screws who was really really nice and said to me 'Would you like something to read?' And I said 'Oh, that'd be wonderful. I've read that prison book six times. And she said 'Oh, that's good. That's good. I'll be back to ask you questions on it later.' And she brought me three dreadful books, each of which I read three times, but she was so nice. And every time one of these people came, I felt like saying 'Could you just go away so I can get on with my book.' Um, what happened then? Oh, towards the end of the week, this really, really fearsome screw um, said 'You're going to be um, you're going to be released on Friday. And normally, we would give you a travel warrant, a travel pass or something - a permit and some subsistence. But we can't do that if we don't know your name.' And I said 'That's, that's fine. That's absolutely fine. I'm a Greenham woman, I'm resourceful. I'll get my way home, get to my way home.' I said 'Yeah, yeah.' They said 'It's a very long way. How are you going to get home?' I said 'Not a problem. Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it.' Ever so polite, ever so polite all the time. Anyway, come the day, we were given travel permits, and we were given subsistence. And um, we were taken at 5 in the morning or something ridiculous, I mean the last night, the last night they moved Helen and I from this house - we had met up - everyday you had 15 minutes exercise, and Helen and I had taken exercise together, and it was just walking around

a great big tennis court. But it was lovely because it was so hot and it was nice to be out in the air. And we were not allowed to talk to each other, but of-course we did. But we were taken on the last night into the main building, into the punishment block, which is where the other eight women had been all the week. And oh my god, it was so awful. And I was so grateful that you know, I'd ended up in a room with a window and sunlight, and um, and whatever, but we spent that last night in the punishment block, which was really like an old fashioned prison cell. High window that you couldn't look out of. And then the next morning, yeah, 5 or 5.30 in the morning we were taken to - I can't remember the nearest station, but it was just a train station and then we were let out and we got our tickets back to back to Newbury? I don't know. And 96p subsistence. And I was absolute idiot. I was so jubilant that I went straight away to the buffet place and I bought a Guardian. And because I'm a real coffee head, a cup of coffee, and my 96p had gone and I was going to end up in London Euston, and how was I going to get home, because I'd got no money. Because that was, that was another thing that was so depersonalising that knowing that you were going to do this action, I packed very, very carefully and I had a little backpack, which had a good long book in it. Um, and clean knickers and a toothbrush, and Tampax and knitting needles, knitting - that's what I thought I'd do when I'm in prison, but of-course they took all that away. And any money that we had they took away.

Did you not get that back?

Oh, yes, I did. But I had to go to Newbury police station to to pick it up a couple of weeks later. But I got to Euston and that was in the days when you have bus conductors.

Yeah.

And I didn't live that far away - I lived in Hammersmith 3 or 4 miles north of Euston, but I just got on the bus, and when the conductor came by I just looked out the window, and thought I hope I'm gonna get away with this - I haven't got any money. But I did, I got home. But yeah that felt

like a very big thing. And part of the reason for that action, or maybe the reason - I can't really remember now, but they were in the process of changing the laws, so that um, trespass would be actually a criminal offence. And that if you trespassed on their common - their common, I ask you, our common - you could be held, and you could be held for an indefinite period until they'd got a verifiable name and address. Which is why it was the No Name action. So we, you know, did the action, served our sentence and came out with no criminal record, because they didn't know who the fuck we were. (Laughs). Which was just brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. And I felt so, so good.

Did all ten of your um, comrades come out in the same sort of relief state of mind as you did?

Oh we were so badly behaved, because we had to get on a train to take us down to London, and it was a commuter train that was stopping at every single train station for people going to work. And we were just so loud, and so hysterical, so jubilant. But um, they must have thought, well, they probably thought - I bet there are noisy Greenham women, and in that instance, we certainly were. But after that, the - I think it was, that was June '85, and I think in September '85, the bill became an act with this, um, you know, holding you until they - you've, they've got a verifiable name and address.

Is that still enforced?

Oh yes. Oh, yes. It's part of the Public Order Act. And so I then had to pull my horns in a bit, because, by this time I was doing my training for headship and um, I just I couldn't - I felt too conflicted about it. And the thing is that I'd got a taste for action now - I didn't want to just go sit around the fire and sing songs. I wanted to do things. And it became too risky in terms of my career. So I did pull back. I still went to camp. And I still, you know, did lots of driving for other women to different parts of the camp and so on. But I didn't - and it was also the beginning of Cruise Watch - you heard about Cruise Watch?

Yes. Yes.

Because by that time the missiles had arrived. I think it was '83 they arrived, and every now and then they took them out on a little trip.

Yeah.

And a lot of my friends were doing that and getting arrested, and going to prison. And I would drive them to certain points, but I wouldn't be part of the action. And so I went ahead and became a head teacher. So I suppose my involvement lasted from '82 until '86. Yeah, so...

It's quite a long time.

It's quite a long time. And it feels like a really, really important, formative time of my life. Um. It was definitely the politicisation of me, because all those conversations around the campfire, they weren't just talking about this action. We were talking about other issues, feminist issues and um, environmental issues and things and it was then I joined the Labour Party and Greenpeace, and became involved in a lot of those things as well, that are little less dodgy in terms of prison sentences.

Was there an acknowledgement of the, the sort of necessity of the support networks to allow these actions to happen? Because that hierarchy of sacrifice does involve other people supporting your sacrifice to an extent. Was that ever acknowledged? I mean, you, you, you can't stay at Greenham without people bringing you stuff, you can't do actions without somebody having a car, or income, or a job - was that...

Acknowledgement by whom?

I guess by everybody. I mean was that was - there an acceptance, like you were saying, of everybody doing what they could - and that being just as vital - the little bits, and the weekend support, and the money, and the driving and...

I think that hierarchy existed right 'til the very end. The sort of implication you're not a real Greenham woman because you haven't left home and your family - for some, for some of the hardliners. But I became quite friendly with Rebecca, and I knew she just appreciated everything we did. And Helen John too, who was one of the founder members, she's died now.

Yes.

Yes, and I was in touch with her long time after I had stopped being part of it all. Um. So I never doubted my own value as part of the movement. Um. But I knew there were others who did. And the, the terrible absence of press coverage, I mean, many times there was a sort of D Notice served, which meant that things couldn't be reported on. And I reached out a bit to female journalists - Kate Adie, I wrote to her after the bus action. Because although I hadn't been part of that bus action, I had other friends who were, and had gone to jail. And it was just not reported at all, not even in The Guardian. And I wrote to her maybe 3 days afterwards, and she wrote back saying 'It's old news.' You know, and there was - so that kind of acknowledgement was just not there.

Do you think women's issues in general - that's a terrific phrase, I'm sorry I used that, do you think news around women is often downplayed by media organisations? I know that currently, people feel that death to domestic violence and sexual violence are underreported as being not newsworthy. Do you think that Greenham suffered from that same fate?

Oh, very much so. I mean, it, it really was, it was vanguard-y in as much as it was really the most public demonstration since the Suffragettes that have been led by women. And so there was a lot of sort of shock horror probe. Um. No, not enough probe, but just shock horror, focusing mostly on women's sexuality. They were only, you know, 'They're all lice-ridden lesbians, and they're only living at Greenham common, because they've got nowhere else to go.' Um. Yeah, a lot of that negativity. And it was really only The Guardian that reported

positively at all. But there again, not very often because of the D Notices. So there wasn't, there wasn't acknowledgement that I would like there to have been by the media. I think, I mean, you talk about women's issues now and um, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and things and um, the pay gap - everything. Yes, I think they're underreported. But I think they're nine times better than they were then. You know.

Yes.

So...

And how was, how was women's sexuality viewed at the time, was it universally negative? Was it something that was seen as - oh, I don't know, I can't imagine how it was portrayed back in 1982. I mean, sexuality seems much less of a...

Oh, much less now, much less. I think it's much easier to come out now than it was for us.

Yeah.

Um. Yeah, I think it was very frowned upon. And there was always this um, underlying thing of 'Oh, you're only with a woman because you can't get a man you know, you're fat, you're ugly you're hairy', and so on. There weren't very many positive images of lesbians, except in sort of feminist circles. So it depended on where you went, I mean, there were a lot of theatre groups who were doing some quite adventurous stuff around sexuality. Um, Sensible Footwear was one of them!

(Laughs).

And um, I can't remember the other names, but some really good sort of musicians who were trying to bring things to the forefront.

I, I wonder whether there is any positive impact in it raising the profile of lesbianism, in that it meant that people knew that it was there, or whether that was not instrumental at all? I would imagine if I was isolated, and feeling like my sexuality was an issue - to know that there were lots of lesbians out there, and that I - there were or was that something that people always knew. I don't know what it would have been like growing up in the '80s.

Well, as I said, when I first went to Greenham, I was 33 and I'd probably been entertaining thoughts of relationships with women since I was about 13. But I had never dared - it was too scary, and well, also in education, it's - it was very difficult to be out. Working in schools, I never came out to children. I very rarely came up to parents. I did come out to colleagues. But um, you know, there's all these weird, distorted views that all um, homosexuals are pedophiles, and um, your, you know, your children might not be safe. And I think that went - that lasted even longer than that. And in '92 - 10 years afterwards, when I was a very happy, well, well established lesbian, I was in relationship with - a long term relationship, we were together 17 years, with a midwife. And I was a primary teacher, and we moved to a village much smaller than this, on Exmoor and because of her job, which was working with women's bodies, and because of my job which was working with children, we were quite guarded - we felt we had to be, because, because people do have this distorted image. Um. And while I was working in London for Ilio (spelled phonetically), Ilio was very much in the forefront, and I was part of all sorts of working parties around um, women's issues, and um, there were warnings all the time. As a man or a woman, straight or gay, you should not be in a classroom on your own with one child. Because it was open to interpretation - misinterpretation. I've gone off the point a bit now. So ask me another question. Have a biscuit!

(Laughs). Okay, I had some questions, and they have all just gone out of my head under the pressure of being asked! Do you think - one of the things I'm most interested in, is what made Greenham possible, and why it doesn't feel like that sort of mass action would happen nowadays?

And I don't know whether you think about whether it was very time specific, or what has changed since then.

Issues.

Yeah, yes, was it just to do with the issue being so overwhelmingly huge that people felt they had to act, or was there something else about politics at the time, or people at the time? Was there more optimism why women don't want to be in these women only spaces anymore, or why they don't see the value of women only actions in a way that was embraced back then?

Um, ooh, that feels like about seven questions.

It is probably! Pick any one of them.

Any one of them. Um, I think what made it possible - possible was your first question. It was the dogged determination of that group of women who marched from Wales to Greenham common, and I have the utmost admiration for them. Ann Pettitt, Helen, John, other names I can't remember. But that initial group of women who marched on the common and set up camp there, and initially - I don't know if you know this, but initially it was a mixed camp.

Yes.

And things went wrong, and the men wanted to lead and to take over and everything, and that same bunch of women said 'No, this is going to a women's only camp.' And so I admire them for that. And I think that was a good choice. And that made it possible. And just their persistence. I mean, they, they marched there in December, it wasn't a balmy June day, you know, and they had to set up their own systems, ways of working - um, and the conditions, the conditions were absolutely foul most of the time. And the evictions, and the vigilantes, and the total, total negativity with which they were viewed. So I think that's what made it possible. And they also reached out, and networked, and came

to London where I was, and made connections and, you know, and it all just kind of mushroomed. Um, I don't know about - I don't really know about the politics of the time being an influence, although much later, much later probably '83 / '84 - when was the miners' strike?

'84/'85.

Yes. Um, there was very much a strong coming together of those two causes. And at the gate, I was at - Orange Gate, we made the connection with a group in Bentley in Yorkshire. And the women actually came to Greenham, and we went up there, and we supported each other. And I think there was some pretty horrible stuff going on. And the women who'd set up the camp originally just thought, er, well, we must challenge this as well. And so on...

Was that horrible stuff going on around the miners' strike?

Oh yes, yes. And dreadful, dreadful way the men - the miners were treated and yeah, it felt, it felt a really kind of edgy time time. And you asked me a long time ago about humour and lightness, and yes it was very, very important, and yesterday I found this - I don't know if you've seen this - the Greenham factor?

The last lady I spoke to has one of these - it was amazing.

I mean some of the photographs in here are just fantastic.

Yeah.

And some of the banners that it features.

Wow. The, the artwork that I've seen come out of it is quite spectacular.

Oh, phenomenal.

The newsletters and the drawings.

Yeah, yeah.

And the poetry. Yeah, it is amazing.

I think that's Sue - I didn't know her then, but I think that is her.

I love that.

(Inaudible as papers are looked through).

So that decision to expel the men is one of the most vital decisions that happened - or not to expel, expel might be a bit of a loaded word, but to make it women only. It seems to me like it, it couldn't - the movement couldn't have gone on without it being women only, or that the way evolved was entirely predicated on it being a women only movement. I don't know if that's a correct, perception?

I think the success and the longevity, longevity of it were definitely predicated on that. And I mean, there were other bases nearby where um, they were mixed. And I just think that men, I mean, I'm not a separatist by any means. And I've got some really good friends who are men, and I've got brothers and things. But I do think that men are wired differently. And in the face of protest, they want to get aggressive, and sometimes that, you know, becomes violent. And there was always an emphasis um, at Greenham - around the fire, and at London in our groups, that all our action was going to be non-violent. And I think, I think that confused the police. Um. You know, the sort of passivity or apparent passivity of women just been dragged along the ground, you know, and them not putting up any resistance. So yes, I do think it was very important. And I think - I keep coming back to this word dogged, which is strange because I hate dogs. I'm terrified of dogs. But there was a doggedness in everybody. No, I can't remember anybody ever saying 'Oh, well, we'll just have to give up.' You know. There were so much positivity around, and um, how can we, how can we continue to

challenge this? One action I didn't mention was the big fence pulling down. That was after the missiles had arrived.

Yeah.

And it was a huge action, and we pulled down something like 4 or 5 miles, the 9 mile fence all at the same time. I was involved in that action, it was really great. And I went with a very good friend and her mother who was 83, and her mother was in a wheelchair. And um, have you heard about black cardigans? You must have heard about black cardigans.

No.

Oh well, black cardigans was the codeword for bolt cutters - BC, bolt cutters, black cardigans. And so we were asked to come to this action equipped with bolt cutters, and you needed quite heavy duty ones to cut through the wire. And remember Hettie, the old lady in the wheelchair, had about four pairs of bolt cutters under her blankets on her wheelchair. And when we got to the fence, she handed them all out and we cut here and we cut here. That was magnificent. I mean, okay, it was only a wire fence, but it was very, very symbolic. You knew we are breaking down walls that separated us.

What kept everybody so positive? That's, I think from an objective sort of outsider view, you think well how did people keep going in the face of, you know, the continuing Cold War and the awful rhetoric in the media, and the...

I think um, the fun and creativity of a lot of the actions um, even those that failed - I remember another one where we gathered for a weekend and we constructed the symbol of the spider's web. We constructed a huge, huge spider's web, and planned to attach it to helium balloons that would fly over the fence. Only it all went horribly wrong. And the helium wasn't strong enough or something, or the wind was too hard and it blew it in the opposite direction, but the fun around that - the gathering with

other women, with a purpose like that. I think the friendships, the singing. The singing was very, very important.

Yeah.

And as you've mentioned the, I mean, it was for the women who lived at camp the whole time, they weren't constantly breaking into the base or doing other subversive things. There was a lot of sitting around, and people wrote wonderful poetry, did fabulous paintings and drawings, and um, I think it was a place where a lot of women found themselves. I found confirmation in my lesbian sexuality, but I also found um, my politics really, and I think that was happening for an awful lot of people. So it was very, very powerful and yes, it must be remembered.

Yes. I think there is a genuine joy in subversion. I think you see it in children all the time.

Oh sure, yeah. Yes indeed.

There is nothing quite so fun as breaking the rules, especially if you can do it with your friends.

Right!

(Laughs). And not get too severely punished for it.

Indeed. Indeed.

Is there anything else you would think...

Well, I can't think - I feel I ought to have done more preparation. I thought you were going to ask me questions. I do have a lot of memorabilia and artefacts. And I know you're not about that today. But I will give you that to take away.

That's fantastic, and when you were going through your memorabilia, what - you said it was a really enjoyable experience.

Oh, it was.

Were there things in there that you hadn't seen for a long time?

Um. Yeah, photographs in particular - photographs of me 35 years ago. Um, sharing those with Jan, my wife, who wasn't involved in Greenham at all. Oh, look how young we look! And I was young, and I was really energetic and up for anything - providing at the end, I wasn't going to be arrested. And we - I don't know if Sue mentioned this in her interview, but we also set up a sort of Greenham-on-sea in see Brawdy in Pembrokeshire. Did she mention?

Oh, yes, we talked a lot about Brawdy.

Oh, right. Well, she and some other friends organised this because we were all into surfing as well. She used to organise a surf camp every week, every summer. And we'd go to, we'd go to Brawdy, and we'd surf all day. And then at night, we'd demonstrate outside what used to be RAF Brawdy, and then became USAF. And um, we used to go and demonstrate outside the gates when there were shift changes and things. That was my first arrest actually, got arrested there. And it just was extraordinary - Brawdy, I don't know what's there now. But at that time, we were reliably informed that what you could see - this group of buildings on the hill was actually one tenth of what was there, and the other nine tenths, like an iceberg, was underground. And it was the biggest submarine tracking station in Europe at that time.

Yeah.

And I remember being bundled into a police car and handcuffed to a young PC. And I remember saying to him 'Aren't you worried? Do you live near here? Do you live near here? Aren't you worried for yourself and your family? You do realise that this subtracting station is a prime

target?' You know, and he said (adopts welsh accent) 'Oh, no, I'm alright. I live in Fishguard - that's 10 miles away.' And I said 'Listen mate, if they launch one of these missiles, it'll blow the whole principality of Wales out of the water.' You know.

That's partly ignorance about the impact....

Absolutely.

Really?

Yeah. Yeah.

I find that phenomenal.

Yes, it really was.

As a child in the '80s. I grew up with, you know, um, um, sort of cartoons When the Wind Blows and...

Yes, Raymond Briggs.

Yeah, absolutely. I thought it was a absolute given that - of all being annihilated.

Yeah. Yeah. The local people just didn't know.

Was it too much to contemplate, do you think - the idea that it could actually be the end of life as we know it?

Yes. But I think that persists today. You know, that lunatic Trump gets his finger on the button, we're all gone. (Laughs). We are all gone.

Yeah. I suppose. I, I am fascinated by the line between sort of paralysis in the face of overwhelming fear, and action in the face of fear

Yeah, yeah.

And given that the world is probably no less a scary place today as it was then, we, we seem to not engage with it in the way that it was, you know, people went we're going to engage with this, we're not going to pretend it's not happening, we're going to do something about it. And that, to me seems fantastically brave.

But a lot of that, I think the ignorance was because of the lack of reporting the Cold War, and all the secrets around it, and the lack of reporting about um, demonstrations and actions that went on, and what they were about, what were they demonstrating against, really. Um, so yeah, that poor man in Fishguard, I hope I opened his eyes a little. That was a great action actually, because we um, we were in custody overnight, and then released, but we had been arrested and charged. And a local lawyer got in touch - probably with Sue, and said 'I'd like to represent you.' And so um, we did have our day in court, and I had to throw a sickie that day because it was during the week, and we went down to Haverfordwest to court. And this guy, this lawyer had found out that the road we were sitting on and blockading was, um, it was actually public road, and so we had every right to be there, and so we were all acquitted.

Oh fantastic! Yeah.

So no criminal record from that either.

Were there many women professionals involved? You were saying when you went to court in the No Name, action that they brought out three women magistrates, do you think that was intentional? It sounds very intentional. Or were there a lot of female magistrates around at the time?

I don't know. I mean, there were court, Greenham court cases in the magistrate's court almost every day of the week, around that time, you know, not just for the No Name. So I don't know if that was just how the

rota worked out on that day. But there was absolutely no sympathy. Oh, another thing I forgot to tell you - when I was in jail, and I saw this, this deputy governor came to see me, and she was quite hardline and saying 'Well, you know, you're going to have to tell us who you are and...', saying things like 'If you tell us who you are, then we'll let you have recreation with the other prisoners.' And, I was too terrified for words about that happening. Although, I had made some contacts - because it was so hot, and I had a sash window, I throw it up, and there were women in that house opposite who started sort of calling out to me and they weren't unpleasant at all - 'What's your name? What's your name?' And I, you know, I replied that I wasn't gonna tell anybody my name. And they said 'All right, then we'll have to call you peace woman.' So I became peace woman. And they were lovely. And they played really good music, and so I enjoyed their company. But the best contact I had with - I must go back to this deputy governor in a minute, but the best contact I had was, I think it was on my first morning. Um, there were a couple of really young women, I mean they had to be 18 to be there, but they will probably only just 18, and um, they came to clean my window, and the windowsill outside, and got talking to them. And they said 'We hear you're called peace woman.' I said 'Yeah, that's - I'm peace woman.' 'Why are you here?' And so I told them about Greenham, which they knew nothing about, and they said 'Well, what do you mean, what do they keep there?' And I said 'Well, the Americans keep their bombs there. But, you know, I didn't give them permission. Did you?' And they said 'No!' I said 'Yeah, well, Thatcher has said that, um, you know, they can keep their bombs there. And we don't think it's right. And it's common land, and it's yours. And it's mine', and just really sort of simplifying it. And they said 'Do you want to know what we're in for?' And I said 'Well, if you want to tell me, sure.' And they said 'We're both here for arson.' And I said 'Right.' And they said 'Tell you what, when we get out of here, we'll get down to that Greenham common, and we'll bomb the place.' (Laughs). So I felt, you know, education was carrying on, even though it was half term! So that was quite fun - that comes into the play. But this deputy governor having said to me 'You know, you're going to have to give your name', and so on. As she was leaving, she said 'By the way, do you a woman at Greenham common called,'

and she gave a woman's name, which was quite unusual. And I said 'No, I don't think so, why?' And she said 'Oh, she's a friend of mine.' (Laughs). And I thought how ridiculous. This woman here holding this, this system and yet she's got a friend at Greenham. So there were some humorous things in that experience. But this lovely screw, who got me the books. What was good - because it was semi open, there was a lot of movement around - I could see out of my window. And on the door, there was a timetable of what to expect - when, when was lunch when was breakfast, and so on. And I knew in the morning there was classes or jobs of various kinds - gardening and so on. And so I knew what time of day it was by the movement that was going on, and er, anyway one afternoon, I think it was the second or third afternoon, this friendly screw Mrs. Collins came in and said to me 'Um, would you like a bath?' And I said 'Oh, would I!' And she said 'Well, everybody's out, everybody's out. So I'll take upstairs and you can have a bath.' And I said 'Oh, this wonderful.' Because I, you know, just doing washing with bowls of hot water and things. And as I got up there she said 'I'll give you this,' and she gave me two little sachets of bubble bath. And she said 'You could put this one in the water. And then if you want to wash your hair, you can use this one.' She said 'And I won't come in. I'll give you privacy, but I'll be outside the whole time.' I can't tell you the joy of sinking into that bath - it was fabulous. It really was, and she was so lovely. I'd love to have kept in touch with her, but it just wasn't possible. But she - some of the other screws were really horrible, and really unfriendly and you could imagine them sitting in the room saying 'I'll find out who she is. I'll get her name, you watch me.' But this one she never...

So the reason to them getting your name was so that you would then have a criminal record?

Yes, yes. And a photograph and fingerprints and whatever. Yeah.

Could put you on the database.

So it's a bit amazing it never happened.

It is, it is amazing that you have a criminal record without having a criminal record.

Absolutely, I mean, I could never have gone on to be a head teacher. Now amongst my artefacts, and again, I don't know if this is interesting or not. You said that Sue had given you a VHS recording.

Yeah.

I've got, um...

Yes.

When I came out, I mean, I had left my then partner at the fence. She didn't want to do the action. And so I went into the base, went to Reading, went to Styal - she had no idea where I was, or what had happened at all. But because I didn't come home, she guessed that I had been charged. And of-course, we weren't allowed to contact people at all. But as soon as I got home after my illegal bus ride, I phoned her at work and said 'I'm home, I'm home!' And she said 'I'm leaving work now. I'll be there in 20 minutes. I want to hear every single thing.' So before I started - again, it was beautiful weather, sitting out in the garden, surrounded by cats, picnic, whatever. And er, she said 'Before you start talking, I want you to get a tape recorder. I want to tape this.' And so I told her about the whole action, and the whole experience of going to prison and everything. And I've got it on tape.

Fantastic.

And it's quite a good recording, you know, it's not - it's a bit homemade, but it's, it's so it's very sort of live.

Have you listened to it?

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. And some of it makes me tear up about how frightening it was at the time. But some of it just makes me, makes me laugh. So it's all in there. And it's all in the play.

That'd be wonderful.

(Edit in recording).

There is - I think they've had a lot of response, and I think they want to make sure that they can actually hear everybody who has something to say, and I think there's a sort of feeling that although we've only got the resources to do 100 interviews, actually everybody needs to have the opportunity to contribute experiences.

Yeah.

Because it's such a big, such a big thing. Such a big thing. And it did succeed. And I, it doesn't get credited.

No, it doesn't.

But actually, it did succeed.

It did. And all the affirmation I need came from Tony Benn.

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And people like to downplay factors, I think, but actually, you can't downplay something as monumental as that.