

Louella Crisfield

We've got Lou Crisfield here, who's gonna tell us about her experiences at Greenham. How old were you when you first went there?

Well, I'm trying to remember. I think I must have been oh, 15/16, I think. So I think I was involved with a local CND group in Camberley in Surrey. And there were some pretty strong women in that group who - you know, they all lived on council estates, it was quite a working class um, CND grouping compared to a lot of the other much more middle class ones that I came across at Greenham. And, and yeah, it was through them really that I first started going to Greenham, when I was still living at home. Still at school. Yeah.

Cool. And um, what's the longest amount of time you ever spent there as a teenager?

Well, I, when I was a teenager, I didn't stay overnight, so I'd just be going to, to visit. And then it was when I left home, I think I'm getting this timeline right - I do get confused about timelines.

It doesn't matter.

I guess when I left home, um, oh, no, it wasn't even then it was before I left home, I think it was when I started - I did a foundation course in art when I was 18. And that was in Farnham, and I used to go to Greenham and spend time at the weekends there. And then when I left home properly, I think it was between then - the summer when I left Farnham Art College and then I moved to London and moved into a squat, that I spent, you know, weeks on, weeks on end at Greenham.

Really?

Yeah, so some, probably 2 weeks would be the longest I'd spent at any one point. And then I would go...

And what gate were you at?

Orange, I was always at Orange Gate, and I'm not entirely sure why.

What was the personality at Orange Gate? Because they all had their unique thing, didn't they?

It was very mellow. And um, yeah, it was fun. There was a lot of fun going on. There wasn't - obviously it was very political, but you didn't feel that you would - in some gates, I felt a bit judged. Yellow Gate, for example. Blue Gate had a real sort of wild, fun, young, really rebellious personality, which I'd go and visit Blue Gate quite a lot. But sometimes it was too much for me. (Laughs). Sometimes I just wanted the mellowness of Orange Gate. Green Gate was sort of very much the sort of lesbian free love. And that was fun as well. But at the same time, Orange, just Orange felt like a sort of refuge really, from some of the wilder - yeah, some of the wilder elements, and some of the more moralistic elements. You felt like you could just be yourself at Orange. So that was a good place to be. And it was also quite pretty. Um we sort of had quite a nice sort of green space. Blue was just right on the, on the gate itself, which was pretty out there. And pretty relentless constantly in contact with with the military all the time, whereas Orange was a little bit setback.

There was a little woods, wasn't there?

Yeah, it was, it was really pretty and I really liked it there. And the personalities were great. So I just - I struggle to remember people's names, there was a woman called Jill, who was an older woman who - well she probably was in her 40s, maybe even 30s. But she felt much, much older than me. And I remember her singing songs, and just teaching me an awful lot about activism and about feminism and about life. And then there was - the owners of the brown van. (Laughs). And younger girl - teenage girl called Di. And then there was another woman called Di. There was a whole lot of personalities, it was quite

mixed in terms of class and in terms of age, which suited me really well as well. Yeah, that's why I chose it.

I remember the latrines in the shape of the women's symbol in the bushes!

Do you!

Do you remember that?

No! Gosh, isn't it interesting what you remember and what you forget.

I had to dig it.

Oh, you probably did. Yes, absolutely.

You did loads more than I did. What was - I mean you were on so many actions, what was the, what sticks in your mind about the activism there?

(Sighs). So sometimes the activism was sort of a big thing that was organised from, from all the women - or even outside groups that would come in and there would be a big action, you know, there was the holding the hands around the base and...

Embrace the Base.

Embrace the Base. And then there were actions going out and stopping cruise missile convoys. And there was a lot - I remember those quite vividly - Yellow Gate blockading the gate, and stopping things coming out and coming in.

I remember doing that - we had to lie down.

Yes, yeah, absolutely. Um, and then there were the times which were much less mass actions. They were just smaller ones, like a few of us

would get together and say 'Well, I just feel like going in and doing some damage to the base tonight.' (Laughs).

Just feel the need!

You just feel the need and then you would just cut cut a hole, and in you'd go and see how far you could get.

What did you use - bolt croppers?

Bolt croppers.

Trusty bolt croppers.

And other times you'd climb up over the top.

Oh right, is that hard to get it?

No, not really. You could use carpets to go over the barbed wire.

To climb up - put a carpet over?

Yeah, yeah.

Clever.

And yeah, it was quite weird being inside.

Was it?

Yeah, it was very strange. It was (sighs) felt like a different world. Because you're always on the outside of it. And you get in and then you realise it was, it was a bit, you know, humdrum, really just roads and some buildings. But it still felt quite foreboding because you knew there were these weapons in there. And you knew the purpose in there was really very evil. So it was quite odd going in there, and I went in a couple

of times and did graffiti, and came out again and wasn't caught. And then quite a few other times I was caught.

What graffiti did you do?

I think it probably was things like, you know 'Cruise missiles out', or women's symbols. I can't remember what we wrote. It was nothing particularly special, sadly.

Women's symbols are very special.

Yes. And I remember being held inside - they had sort of holding um, they must have had them specially for us, portacabin type things. Where you'd be processed in there and then then you'd have to wait for the transport, and the police would use the transport to take you out. And sometimes then you'd get driven into Newbury into the police station there.

So tell me first time you got nicked, then.

I can't really remember because there were a number of times! And I'm not sure that the first time I was nicked was at Greenham, I think it might have been at Molesworth.

Oh yes.

Um. But I think the first couple of times I got nicked, nothing really came of it, it never went any further. And then the next few times I was held in Newbury police station overnight for maybe 2 or 3 nights sometimes, because there wasn't enough room in Holloway. Because it was often after some of the bigger mass actions. And so instead of - it was quite weird. So instead of sentencing you to a prison sentence, you ended up sort of having it in the police cells, and I can't remember how they got away with that. Whether that was actually sanctioned by a court or not, it's just too - I'm afraid it's too long ago to remember.

But as a teenager, it's pretty scary being locked up for 2 nights in the cop shop.

Yeah. And then there was the time when I did go to prison because I'd refused to pay the fine. So I was fined and I refused to pay it, and so I was then sentenced to, I think it must have been a month in prison, but I only spent 2 weeks - which is pretty standard.

In Holloway prison?

Well, in most prisons, I think you just serve half your sentence most of the time. So it was only 2 weeks. But I do remember feeling very frightened. Yeah. Um. But I had my knitting with me, I had my books. Had my things ready. (Laughs).

What was your cell mate like?

Well, that was interesting. So my cell mate was actually a skinhead who was um, who was very right wing.

Nightmare!

Yeah, so your idea of a total nightmare cell mate, but she was actually in for assaulting a police officer. So our mutual dislike of the police was something that we had in common. And actually I got on quite well with her in the end. I think she was quite a frightened young woman. And actually, once you got into the swing of prison, you know, it was boring.

Really?

That was the main thing I remember, it was very dull. And I remember other women just being in, in terrible situations. You know, there was, there was me who had chosen to go to prison - I probably could have managed to get the money to pay the fine - my friends would have paid it, but I had chosen to go as a political act. And the other women in there hadn't - so they'd be might be in there for stealing a pair of shoes,

for stealing food, for minor drug offenses, and it did feel like a really brutal way to treat people for such ridiculous things. And you could tell that a lot of people were being drugged up, you know to keep them quiet. They were tranquilized, basically to control them and you know, it was a pretty brutal system, but I was treated fine. I went in under the name of Diana Spencer. Because in those days you could get away with pretending to be whoever you wanted to be. And the prison guards thought it was quite amusing - they'd curtsy to me. Yeah, that was quite fun. And my parents mucked it up rather by writing to Diana Spencer in prison, and then actually saying 'Dear Lou' in the letter - not realising that the prison officers open the letters first to read them. But there we go. Yeah. And then I guess, oh, I do remember my first night in cells before. I remember I obviously wasn't ready at that point, didn't have my knitting or my books. And I remember that I asked for some paper and a pen, because I knew you could. And I made myself a whole set of playing cards, and played patients. And they were quite beautiful. And I spent a lot of time making them and drawing them (laughs). And then somebody bought me a book in and that was the Adrian Mole book. And it's very short. And I had to read it over and over again, it was very boring. I was sick of it by the end. I wish somebody had brought me War and Peace or something. But there we go, better than nothing.

Was that in Newbury, then?

That was in Newbury, yeah.

So you were stuck in the police cells with nothing to do?

Yeah.

Ah, the tedium.

The tedium, absolutely the tedium, but there we go. There's nothing compared to people who you know, who go to prison for a long time. One thing I do remember after being in prison was this feeling, which stayed with me until I guess, I guess until around 9/11, which was, if

that's the worst they can do to me, I'm not scared. I'm not scared of breaking the law, of being arrested, or standing up for what I believe in. But then after 9/11, I think there is reason to be scared. You had things like, you know, the extraordinary rendition, Guantanamo, all those sorts of things. And then I began to realise no, the state can actually do a lot worse to you than put you in Holloway. It could be an awful lot worse, not that I've got anything to fear - I'm a white, middle class woman, but but other people have got a lot of fear. That was a weird sort of transition from thinking that's the worst they can do to realising hhm, it could be a lot worse.

But still very brave to put your liberty at stake like that, for what you believe in. And did what sort of the other women at Orange Gate - did they support you in this? You know, you said you went as deliberate political act - what was the feeling?

Yeah, they did.

Did you have an affinity group or something for these actions?

I didn't at that point, I think I had been involved in, I had been involved in affinity groups when I'd lived in Camberley, when I was living at home, and in CND, and had gone and done actions at Molesworth. By the time I was at Greenham more, no I wasn't really in affinity groups. But yeah, they supported me, and they were going to prison, and they were doing similar things. But I think by the time I actually did serve that sentence, I was more London based. I was getting involved in squatting campaigns. And I was slowly drifting away from Greenham, which is a bit sad.

But you were serving your community?

Yeah, yeah.

I remember you used to hitch, didn't you?

Yes.

Tell me about your trips. How did you get to Greenham?

Well, when I lived in Camberley, I'd hitch out on the - it must have been the M3, and then there was a way through to the - I can't remember how I did it, but I definitely did it out of Camberley. And then from London - Gunnersbury, I remember doing that, you came, didn't you?

Yes.

You go out to Gunnersbury, and you go out onto that big A road going out - the sort of dual carriageway and hitch. Yeah.

And you know, people picking you up - do they know you're going to Greenham?

No, not until you got in the car. Um. And some - sometimes you, you would gauge not to say, just saying you're going to go to Newbury or Reading. And then other times you felt safe to say it, and it was okay. I normally had good rides. Coming back was harder, because you'd stink. (Laughs). Stink of woodsmoke, and people would know exactly who you were coming back, because you know the locals knew who was, who was...

Was it easy getting a lift back, or was it hard because of that?

Getting a lift back often was through the network of people who were just driving to London anyway, or supporters in Newbury, but I did hitch, and I got lifts in the end, you know in the end. Sometimes you get a bus - depended on money, really. But often there'd be supporters coming - there'd be a lot of sort of older women, who come with food and drink and, and they'd give people lifts, they were lovely. And men. Yeah men coming too to visit.

Come for the day?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember I got a lift back with Bruce Kent once.

Who's Bruce Kent?

He was the head of CND.

Oh, him, yes.

Yes. And I think I'd just picked up two kittens bizarrely, from, probably from Greenham, and took them back to London. And I think he was most perturbed. He didn't like cats. And I think I rather press-ganged him into taking me home. (Laughs).

He didn't like cats?

(Laughs). No! Anyway, he didn't like the two kittens. Which I don't think we're even in a proper box. I don't think he was very pleased.

Even though Greenham was women-only, there were men there like Bruce Kent.

They would come to visit.

They weren't allowed to stay overnight?

No, they weren't allowed to stay overnight.

And you thought that was a good plan, really?

Yes. I, I think I remember the decision. And I must, there must have been - we must have had discussions, we did in the CND group in Camberley about it. And some people were upset about it. But I remember them being particularly upset about the reports, in the papers about the used sanitary products been hung off the fence, which I

thought actually at the time was quite hilarious. Made me think oh, that's alright! (Laughs).

Did that attract you to it?

It sort of did, because it was just grossing people out. And I just thought, oh, come on, get over it. And I, I, I guess slowly, I began - I don't know, the women-only thing made sense to me. Because you could see the dynamics in political groups, you could see that women were being spoken over. And that when they had ideas, men were sort of trying to name them as their own. And women weren't confident enough to, to be politically active, and have their voices heard when there were men around. And I think, and you saw how different it was when men were not around. And it wasn't so much that I thought women should live separately to men, or organise separately to men in the long term. It was just if this is the only way we can make our voices heard, that's how we have to do it. It was a tactic. It was a sort of learn - well, a growing tactic to get women on an equal footing to men, rather than a...

Build their confidence in a way?

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. It wasn't about living a separatist world. Though I think some women - I think at Green Gate there was a lot of that.

Separatist?

Separatists. Yeah. And I didn't agree with them, but I didn't fall out about it. Not at all. No.

Was there much schisms and splits between the gates? You said there was judgments and differences of opinion?

The big, I guess the big problem came - and I don't know whether now looking back on it now whether I read it all wrong. I might have done,

because I have actually have had some quite good interactions with Kings Cross Women's Centre more recently. But when some people from the King's Cross Women's Centre became involved at Greenham, I do feel that some schisms opened up with Yellow Gate. Yeah. I don't know, I can't really explain it, but they - there was a very sort of moralistic tone going on, and that people were being asked to examine themselves in ways that were maybe right, maybe wrong, I don't know. But, but there certainly weren't discussions had in a sort of friendly comradely manner that meant that people understood what they were getting at. It was very much attacking people and judging them. And when you do that people become entrenched, and they don't want to listen. And that is what happened.

On the defensive?

Yeah, there was a bit of a split, and tell the truth, I don't know how that was resolved, because I think I drifted off and got involved with other things.

Was that the reason?

It was really.

The bad vibes, I suppose?

There was a time when you felt really uncomfortable even going to Yellow Gate to get the water key for getting the water, which was a bit bad.

An atmosphere.

So I'm sure there'll be interviews of people from Yellow Gate who have got completely different versions to say, so.

So you don't think they were cops put in to split everyone up?

Well, I wonder.

In light of what we know.

I do wonder sometimes.

That would be good tactic - send an undercover cop in to make everyone fall out.

Absolutely.

That's what they were doing in the 80s.

Yeah, they were. They were causing massive disruption. And I can't see that the state would have just you know, not had someone in there. But I'm not sure how much has come up in the spy cops inquiry on it, yet - I don't think they've admitted to it yet, have they? Or I think they might have admitted to it, but not said who.

It would be good to know.

It would be good to know. Absolutely.

So you've put here something about squaddies?

Oh, yes. (Laughs). Well, it's quite interesting. One of the questions is seems to be, you know, how did you get on with other men, maybe men who were visiting, the police, or the military. And actually, police - no, didn't get on with the police, and men visiting were fine, but that's not what it was about. But the military, obviously, the arresting officers and the higher echelons - no, but the squaddies, a lot of the men who were patrolling the perimeter fence, had just been in Ireland, or about to go to Ireland, because that was the active service that was happening then - there wasn't anything anywhere else. And I think a lot of them were quite traumatised. And I think a lot of them were just working class young men, who couldn't get apprenticeships couldn't do anything else.

And they ended up in the army. And I didn't see them as my enemy. And I think some of the gates they did. But we didn't certainly, and certainly I remember Orange Gate and at Blu Gate, you know, passing whiskey through the fence. And just chatting to the guys.

And having a drink with them.

Having a drink with them.

On duty as well!

Absolutely. Yeah. Passing drinks backwards and forwards, and just engaging on them. Engaging with them as human beings, and not seeing them as the people that were causing this. They were part - they were caught up in it, just like we were. But I don't think some of the people who came to Greenham approved of that.

Did anybody have a romance with a squaddie?

Yes, I think someone did.

Tell me that!

Oh, I can't really go in - I think somebody did. Yeah, yeah, I heard that she did. Yeah.

How did she get away with it?

Well, I think I think she was moving away from Greenham at the time. But, but yeah, she did.

Blossomed through the fence links!

Yeah, as far as I know. (Laughs).

Want to go for a drink?

I'm not sure how it happened. But I did hear it happened, yeah.

Hysterical.

Someone I didn't know. Which is quite funny. And, why not?

Well quite, I think that's great.

Yeah.

We're all human, aren't we?

Absolutely.

Somebody was asking about disabled women, at the base, and I was thinking of Patty and her broken leg.

Oh, yes.

Hopping around all winter with that cast on.

She was gosh, yes. I mean, that would have been tough.

God, yes.

Because a lot of the life, well obviously you were sitting, squatting around a fire, we didn't have seats really, you were just...

The camping chair hadn't been invented.

No, there were no camping chairs. You were basically possibly sitting on a log, or squatting on your haunches. A lot of the time you were chopping wood, you were - and then sleeping in really rough and ready tents that you knew were going to be removed the next morning by the bailiffs - well actually you didn't know, it wasn't every morning, it was

quite random. And you had to then be ready to move the whole of your camp for the eviction, and then put it back up again, which was just so pointless - do you remember that happening?

I don't think it happened when I was there.

No.

I wasn't there very much.

It was a big feature. So it was when the bailiffs were going to come, you'd - somebody would shout 'Bailiffs', and then you'd have to sort of deal with the fire, put the food away, put your tents away and start getting ready for them to start removing everything and throwing it into the road. And then you'd have to, (sighs), then you'd have to rebuild the camp again, after they'd gone.

Did you lose a lot of possessions in the evictions?

I don't think they took things away, from what I remember. I think they just removed it off the common - off the land, and put it into the road. I think that's what they did each time - I can't, again, it's so hard to remember. I remember a guy - an architect designed a tent specifically for us. And I think that was the precursor of the pop up tents that we have now.

Who knew?

Yeah, so it's like a concertina type thing that sort of pushed together. And you could put your arm through it and gather it up with the stuff in it and remove it. And it was specifically - he designed it for the Greenham common camps.

Well, who knew?

Yeah, so that was very clever. So we were very pleased with those.

I bet, and did - who bought these tents for you? Was it the Quakers?

I think it must have been the Quakers. Yeah, who ended up buying a load of them. Yeah. Yeah.

Sleeping bags?

Yes. And then the Quakers Meeting House - the Friends Meeting House in Newbury was the one place where you could get showers. And cups of tea. Yeah, absolutely. They were they were a complete godsend. Well, they - that's what they'd say anyway. (Laughs). But they were they were really good. Yeah. They were great.

Well, one of the reasons for doing this, so future activists can learn from the experience. What do you say about this? How do you think it's impacted on like, now activism today?

Yeah.

Because the cops have learned from Greenham - they show videos of Greenham to train them on crowd control and things like that. So what have we learned from Greenham?

I guess - what have we learned from Greenham? I guess one of the things about Greenham was that we learned from the older women - from their experience of stuff they've done. And it might not have been within an activism context. It might have been within a union, it might have been, there were women coming from Wales as well, from the miners' strike support groups as well. So there was all sorts of different experiences. And there was a real sort of passing down of ideas from older women to younger women, which was really cool. And I've always been so grateful for that. Really grateful for it, because I think it really molded me, and stopped me from going off on tangents.

Like young people today?

Yeah, absolutely. And stopped me thinking I knew it all. Which was really important 'cause I so didn't, and I so could have done. I don't know about tactics...

(Inaudible) is a thing, especially when you're a teenager?

Yeah.

You don't want to talk to older women, really.

I know and I do find it a little bit depressing at the moment that there seems to be a sort of, they call it third wave feminism seems to be going off on tangents that are quite peculiar to me, that um, and there doesn't seem to be enough engagement with - between the generations, but then maybe that's partly our fault for not trying hard enough to engage. I don't know. In terms of actual tactics, I guess that's probably the peace movement as a whole, isn't it - the affinity group tactics? The non-violent response, not because you believe in non violence itself, because I don't know. I think I did at the time. But now I don't think I do believe that that's always the right way. But I think when your enemy has more power um, than you have, it's probably the sensible thing to do. Because you don't, you know, you don't throw stones if someone's got a gun. So where the power differential is like that, I think, the peace movement and Greenham had it right, that your power is in numbers and tactics and ideas. And I also think the way that Greenham women were totally unafraid of destroying property. And, and it being a direct action against the actual things that were causing the problem, rather than it being symbolic. It wasn't all about marches and banners, it was going in, and actually disrupting what was going on, actually attacking the machine that was making these weapons, or that was, that was facilitating them, and destroying property. And I think that we should all be doing that as much as we possibly can. Yeah.

That's awesome. So when you broke into the base, what sort of thing would you have um, kind of broken?

Well, I mean, obviously, the perimeter fence, it was sort of opening that up, and it was graffiti. And I think, you know, had people managed to get to the actual weapons, or the actual planes, they would have smashed them up. And I think there was a bit of that sort of thing going on. I never got that far. I know. But the Upper Hayford people, they did that - they went in and smashed the airplanes, didn't they? Which I thought was an amazing thing to do.

Was that recently?

That was more recently. Yeah. Yeah.

They were older women as well.

They were. Yeah. So that was new. And I think for a lot of the peace movement, they did find what the Greenham women were doing to be quite shocking, because they believed non-violence meant respect for property as well. There was a lot of that sort of middle class peace movement thing going on. And then I think women at Greenham were like, no, it's not about that. Yeah. So that was cool. That was good. And I think that we've learned from that.

Definitely. And you know the - it's all good, isn't it. So you said here, that what was your relationship like with local residents?

Oh, that was not so great.

So tell us more about that.

Well, I guess you really got the feeling when you wandered around Newbury going to buy food or whatever, that you really got nasty looks, people didn't want to interact with you at all. You'd sometimes get people shouting, you know 'Stinky lesbians' or, you know, some sort of insult - normally sexist. So it wasn't that great. But I say that, and at the same time, we did get lifts. We did manage to hitch, and obviously there

were lots of wonderful people in Newbury, who did really support us. But I think generally the problem with Newbury was, you know, I imagine the Base provided a bit of employment - not massive amount, because it's mainly American personnel. I think if it had been mainly British personnel, we'd have had an even harder time. But I think there might have been some resentment in the town about the Americans. But it did, it did provide employment. And I imagine a lot of people had links, and weren't too pleased with what we were doing, and weren't too pleased that their town was associated with what they saw as a bunch of dirty stinky lesbians. (Laughs).

Must have been a town of two camps?

It was - very much.

Either for or against?

Yeah, very much so, yeah.

I mean, the thing good thing about it is there ain't no nuclear weapons there now.

I know. Absolutely. And they did go. And I yes - interesting that, isn't it? And I think I think a lot of the reason why I, I hope this isn't true, but I think it's partly due because they were American. I think people resented Britain being used as a base by the Americans. And I think that's one of the reasons they went into the end. And I am really glad it went, and it's now common land, which is what we always said it should be. Which is, which is marvelous. Absolutely. So yeah, that was a bit of a victory.

It is, if you take a bird's eye view, it is. And what about the consciousness raising of all those women that had never done anything before like that - do you think that helped?

Yeah, totally. It definitely did. Yeah, absolutely. And not, not just did the consciousness raising sort of empower women, but I think that the meeting of different diverse people at Greenham was very empowering. You were meeting people of different generations, and different classes, and different experiences - some from the cities, some from rural places. And that was, that was really wonderful, though I say it was diverse in that way - it was not diverse, ethnically. It was very white.

Was it?

Yeah. Yeah. It really was, which obviously, wasn't good. And that was I think one of the things that the women at the Yellow Gate were trying to raise. And I think they were right about that. But I'm not sure they had answers that made a lot of sense at the time, that was part of the problem. Another thing I remember, I just thought I'd say is I do remember, I think it must have been the first - was their first bombing of Libya where the weapons I think they - the planes are gone out of Upper Hayford - I think that's right. And I remember sirens on the base at Greenham because they were on high alert. And I remember the panic and fear and just the horror of that - being at the base when that was going on. It was just, that was just horrible.

Did you think that was it?

Well, to a certain extent, but just thinking that you know, the reality was one of these bases - not that base, but another one very similar had been involved in the killing of an awful lot of people. It was horrendous. I remember that being, really sort of knocking things home.

The death?

Yeah, yeah, the death of women, children, men, you know, in our name, it's horrendous. Yeah, and it reminding you why you were there, and what you were doing it for. Yeah. Very much so.

And um, did you keep in touch with many people from Orange Gate?

Sadly, I didn't - there was one woman I did spend a lot of time with, she came and lived in squats with us in London - Jane, who, yeah, we did keep in contact for a long while, and she was wonderful. But I - again I lost contact with her. I think she ended out in Cornwall somewhere - not quite sure what happened to her in the end. But interestingly, I have recently...

Is that Jane Hag?

Yes.

Oh, I remember - tell us about Jane.

Oh, Jane was wonderful. She came to London - she'd been so institutionalised at Greenham - she was trying to break away to a certain extent, or at least have some sort of other base, so she - we opened a squat for her on the same council estate that we were living on. And she just created a second Greenham. So she insisted on cooking on the open - on the fireplace with a big black kettle.

Indoors?

Indoors, yeah. Wasn't interested in having electricity or anything else. It was literally like walking into Orange Gate but indoors on a council estate in East London. So she very much was institutionalised. But she was a laugh, and she was a very wonderful person. So yeah, I hope she's doing well.

Well she may have had her story collected.

She might have done, I hope so.

This might lead to some reunions, you know?

Well, interestingly, a woman who I've met more recently is an ex Greenham woman. And she has opened me up to a few other people on a Facebook page of some ex Greenham women, and I'm beginning to put together memories and names. So hopefully I will be meeting up with some other people at some point soon. Which is great. So yeah.

That's all goes isn't it. Would you say that it shaped you - the experience from 15 years old joining CND has made you Greenham and activism?

Yeah, very much so, yeah. Because I think it taught me from a very young age that you can, with the support of people - like minded people around you, you can be really brave, you can stand up and you can make a difference. And despite other people insulting you, or disparaging you, you can - as long as you believe what you're doing, right, you can just get on with it and make a difference. And that has shaped me massively, gave me an awful lot of confidence. Yeah, and an awful lot of belief in in what women can do. Yeah.

Fantastic. I mean, just the day to day living at Greenham, sort of week in and week out, I mean I know you had other homes as well - so did you have any special recipes that you associate with Greenham, any food, what would you eat there?

I can't really remember what we ate. I mean...

I remember baked beans.

Yeah, baked beans, baked potatoes from the fire. There was a lot of baked potatoes and silver foil from the fire. An awful lot of lovely cake that people would bring for us.

They'd bake?

Yeah. Soup - quite a lot of soup.

Would you make that?

Yeah, sometimes we did. We'd make stews and stuff on the fire. We didn't do an awful lot of cooking, to tell the free from what I remember - I don't think we were great - we'd cook some breakfast. And there's no, there's no great cuisine going on at Orange Gate from what I remember. Or if there was, it wasn't interesting to me at the time. It probably would be more interesting to me now. I was much more interested in when the wine was coming in.

What about like drugs and alcohol?

We did we did have our fair - we had a bit of drinking going on. I didn't take any drugs at Greenham.

A spliff?

I guess there were spliffs going on. But it wasn't a big part of my experience at Greenham...

Were there no problems with drugs there?

There may well have been other gates, but I didn't hear about it, didn't seem to be a problem.

And did alcohol ever become a problem for anyone?

No.

Not even at Blue?

It was, it was certainly known as the hard drinking gate. But whether it became a problem is not something I'm aware of. I don't think it did.

No fighting?

No. There were people stumbling around (laughs), falling over - that sort of thing, but I don't think there was any massive falling out. Well, women don't tend to fight each other when they're drunk. Men might do, but women don't tend to start punching each other.

They cuddle each other.

Exactly, yeah. Fall into bed with each other maybe (laughs), but it's the worst that could happen. And it kept you warm. (Laughs).

One way of keeping warm at night! Creatively we - all those coloured webs on the thing.

Oh yeah. There was a lot of knitting went on, I did a lot of knitting.

Did you know how to knit before you went there?

I did. I did not know how to knit, yeah. Oh, I remember now making jumpers with women's symbols on, and spending ages working out the - making up the patterns on that sort of tiny square graph paper and following - yes, I remember doing that. That's the first time I've remembered that in decades. Black and purple.

Women's jumper.

Women's symbol jumper? Yeah. Yeah.

So you were doing knitting there. Did you do any artwork on the fence?

I didn't, but lots of other people did. Yeah. Yeah. There was a lot of that going on. There was an awful lot of singing.

Oh yes, we've got a few songs in the bag.

From Helen, from various people. And I remember this woman, Jill singing and just having amazing songs, but I don't remember what any of them were, sadly.

Hopefully going to collect some of them. Next round.

Yeah, absolutely.

...research that.

There was an awful lot of singing around the fire at night. And it was lovely. Yeah.

Fascinating time to be part of it, great time to be have your formative years somewhere like that?

Absolutely. I was talking to younger girl today - to Lily.

Well, she's the same age as you were when you first went!

She's 16. Yeah. And she was saying how much she wishes she'd been alive then, because it's so inspiring. It's quite interesting - there's an awful lot going on now as well, but I guess it's less women based, isn't it?

Yes. But now women are more heard, I think.

Yeah, that's true.

Because of ... time...to find our voice.

Absolutely. I mean, certainly, when I came back to London, I was involved in mainly squatters' politics, and politics, around housing, squatting, anarchism, those sorts of things. And I certainly had way more confidence about activism, and talking than I would have done if I hadn't been at Greenham, that is absolutely, without doubt.

It's empowering.

Because it was quite a male movement, in some ways, you know a lot of the practical stuff around, you know, fixing up a squat and doing the locks. And I just thought, well, you know, I've built fires, cut through fences, you know, done quite a lot of practical things at Greenham - I can do this, and very quickly, I was learning how to do plumbing and electrics, and carpentry, and change locks. And that felt good. Lots of other women were as well, there was a real emergence, I think in the '80s, of women in manual trades. And there was a lot of organisations really, really encouraging that.

And do you think that was one of the legacies of Greenham?

I think it probably was.

We could manage - we didn't have...

We could live.

...we could do jobs.

Yes, absolutely. We could live quite independently, quite happily without having to call in a man. Yeah. (Laughs). Things like, I guess car mechanics as well, you know, a lot of the women at Greenham were doing their own car mechanics. They weren't calling in men to mend their vans. They were doing it themselves. Not that it's something I've ever learned how to do.

I was trying to remember what happened when the bailiffs would come into our house, do you remember that - they were going to take everything but the cooker. Remember that?

Oh, was that one of my fines?

Probably.

It might have been from a Greenham fine, I can't remember. How did we stop them?

I think you might have paid it. Because you felt sorry for me.

I think it was actually that lovely American woman who paid it, Donna. Yes. I think she paid that fine.

Did she?

Yes. To stop us going prison again.