

Lyn Barlow

Um, I suppose it'd be great to start by sort of just finding out a bit about how you ended up at Greenham. How did you end up there?

Right, erm, I spent my teenage years in care. I came from a really dysfunctional family. Um, I left care at 18. And eventually - I'd left school with no qualifications. Eventually, I ended up going to an FE college to get O-Levels. And it was 1982. And I became involved with a student union. And we planned a trip to Greenham. So that was the first time I'd ever been. Um, and it was on a big mass demonstration - it wasn't Embrace the Base, because I remember that was later. Um, but I remember going off on my own where we got dropped off. And literally, the first camp that I came across was Yellow Gate. And there was this American woman there called Arlene. And she was just incredible. She made me feel so welcome. But she also challenged me to think in ways that I hadn't thought before. And now looking back on it, I know it's a corny adage, but when I left, the message 'Carry Greenham Home' really meant something, because I couldn't just return back to the life that I was leading. I knew that something had changed.

Was this all in the first - very first visit?

Yes, very first visit.

Wow.

And it had a huge impact on me - seeing the base, up and personal - I'd never taken part in anything that was women only before. So that was incredible. And also, I - although I wasn't very politically aware, I had been politicised in some ways during - whilst I'd been in care - I'd been very rebellious, ran away, got into trouble with the police. Quite a number of the kids I grew up with, specially the boys ended up in the forces. And when I left care it was around the time of the Falklands. And I remember that I started having nightmares about war. And then

with nuclear weapons I started having nightmares about the possibility of nuclear war. And going to Greenham presented a way that I could deal with that fear. Because if I acted, and showed my position, it actually helped me deal with the fear.

And I'm interested that you said that there was something very specific about being something that was women only - what, what was, how did that feel different? And what do you think was so specific about it?

Well, it quite surprised me because, in care, I'd gravitated towards boys, because I'd been badly bullied by a lot of the girls. So I was much more happy kicking a football, climbing a tree, running away, whatever. So I'd never actually done anything, women only. But I'd always had, I think, um, a healthy disrespect for male authoritarian figures, because they reminded me of my father. So I'd always rebelled against that. And there'd been women who worked at the Children's Home who were really strong characters, - independent women. Some of whom I kept in touch with. So Greenham - it, it challenged me, because I was, on one level, I was really drawn to the fact that it was women only - especially the reasons why it was women only, because men gravitate more easily towards aggression, women more easily to non-violence. Where was I? But I was afraid at the same time because of my previous experiences of being bullied by girls. I thought, you know, are these women going to accept me? Um, do I speak - I'm, I'm not as politically politically aware. I'm not as articulate - I lacked confidence. It was the first time that I'd really been in close contact with a lot of more middle class, articulate, educated women. And I found that difficult. But the more I went to Greenham the more I became a part of it, the more empowered I became. And I guess I'd been a sort of closet feminist in my childhood, and this was the first time that I'd actually understood what feminism was really about. And how the personal is political, and joining up the dots between like things that happened to me in my childhood, and poverty, and working class roots, unemployment, whatever - it all seemed to somehow make more sense once I'd become involved with Greenham.

It's um, one of the perceptions I think on the, on the, on the - or that I think is a misconception possibly - you can tell tell me - is that it was a purely middle class sort of campaign. But the more I'm meeting women, the more I'm finding out how very intersectional it was actually, how many lives crossed over.

It was very intersectional in some ways. But now when I look back on it, if it hadn't have been for Arlene, I probably wouldn't have gravitated towards Yellow Gate, because Yellow Gate was - did become predominantly middle class.

Okay.

A lot of the more working class women who were there when I very first went - like Sarah and Arlene - were literally coming to the end of their time at Greenham, they were burnt out. And they were going back to London. Which left quite a core group of older, middle class women. And kind of stragglers like me, and there were working class women, obviously. But if you looked at the makeup of the different gates, they tended to attract particular kinds of action, particular kinds of women.

Can you remember any specifics about that?

Well, I remember Blue Gate - I always associated as being younger women. More working class women. Um, Green Gate we always called the cosmic gate! I used to love going to actions at Green Gate but I couldn't have lived there because I just didn't get the spirituality - I later learned like it, but then it was alien to me.

Were the actions is different as well then?

Yeah. Orange Gate had a really firm - a really core group of women who supported it, especially at weekends - like the Camden women. And local women from Newbury tended to gravitate towards Orange Gate. It was a lot less formal than some of the - than Yellow Gate. Um, Violet Gate was kind of a mishmash, it never really - because it was on the

edge of the road, and there wasn't really a campsite as such, that was always one that kind of were quite fluid. Emerald Gate was a gate in the woods that was created because it had the best view of the silos. I loved Emerald Gate, that was a really good mix at Emerald Gate. Um, so yeah, maybe, maybe if my first time going there had been different and I'd gone to another gate, I might have ended up at another gate. But I think the intensity of Yellow Gate attracted me.

I've heard another woman describe it as being like the city - if there was, if there was a village or towns or whatever, this was the city of Greenham.

But that's something that was really criticised. And I agree with that criticism. I was even guilty of it myself - Yellow Gate thought it was the main camp, because it was outside the main gate.

Okay.

And the way that Yellow Gate women unconsciously often treated women from other gates enforced that.

That's interesting, isn't it? Because, obviously, you, you all addressed the concepts of hierarchy as defined by patriarchy.

Yeah.

Consciously such a lot.

Yeah, we have no leaders here. I wrote a poem about it - if you actually looked, if you scratched the surface, there were women who put themselves forward as leading figures. Like particular women who were always doing the press interviews - because they were good at it. And they knew how to present a case really articulately. But at the same time, that it left out a lot of women who weren't that comfortable with articulating ideas and that, and rather than spreading it around, it became a problem.

Well, I can remember being - having someone explain to me about something similar where they were saying, if you never get to try that thing, you don't get to be good at it, which is one of the reasons why women only space you know, men, men can't just step forward and do all the fun bits like the press interviews and all the bits. And then women can get good at it, and teach each other how to do it. But of course that would...

That did happen. You know, women did become empowered. And they did find different ways of working as women only, and dealing with the press, dealing with like interactions with the public, interactions with the police, the squaddies, you know. Women did share that baseline, that base experience. But there was still women who kind of quite enjoyed being more prominent.

Does that, was that part of - I suppose this could be linked to that sense of, or it could be a completely standalone question. When did - why did you leave in the end? What took you away?

Why did I leave Greenham?

Um. (Agrees).

I think I was probably coming to the end of my time at Greenham anyway.

How long had you been there? Sorry, I forgot to ask that.

I sort of started flitting between Sheffield and Greenham in '83. And moved fully just after my 21st birthday. So that's 1984. I went back to Sheffield to celebrate that, and then moved lock, stock and barrel. So in 1987, I was starting to become disillusioned in some ways. But I don't think I would have left then if it hadn't been for the split.

Okay, and that all centered around Yellow Gate didn't it?

Yeah, yeah - I don't think, I think I would have stayed longer. But the split just for me, um, destroyed everything that I believed in. And it turned woman against woman, specially at Yellow Gate.

Can you tell me a bit more about - can you describe the split?

Yeah, yeah. I'd never come across Wages for Housework campaign before. I'd never heard of them. I knew nothing about them. But I remember distinctly I think, probably '86, late '86 onwards, they started visiting Yellow Gate. They started doing supportive tasks like firewood, food. They never actually got involved in actions. But bit by bit, they became more and more present. And it felt almost - looking back on it - like they were grooming. And I actually believe looking back on it, a lot of the younger women who were involved with Wages for Housework, were like the foot soldiers, and I think they actually did believe the ideology that they were putting forward. But now I look back on it, and things I've learned since, I believe that Wages for Housework campaign existed solely to disrupt and destroy political campaigns and groups. Not only - not women-only ones - mainly women ones. Because after I left Greenham I did some research when I worked for Duncan. And the stuff we found out about them, the ways they'd gone in and disrupted groups. And the way that you never heard of them promoting, you know - having demonstrations, promoting the message that they were supposedly formed about. It all seemed to be about gaining entry and disrupting. And they were really good, in that they researched what they were trying to disrupt, and they found the Achilles heel. And I think this - the reason why they were successful at Greenham, was that they identified that our Achilles heel, specifically Yellow Gate's Achilles heel was race and class. So they came in, and they made accusations of racism. And that split the camp, because all of us felt slightly that Greenham had failed on some levels to relate to women of colour and, and what they've been through - it wasn't as immediate a concern to them, they were fighting their own battles. So we were sensitive to being accused of being racist. And what they did was there was, there was a conference in Russia. And quite a few women from Yellow Gate

went on it, and some local women went on it, and some of the Camden women went on it. And there was a workshop that had been specifically put aside as a Greenham workshop. And Sarah Hipperson from Yellow Gate stood up to introduce the Greenham workshop, and handed it over to the Wages for Housework, to put forward their thing. So one of the local women - Lynette spoke up, and said 'This is supposed to be a Greenham workshop.' And from that moment onwards, they said that she had committed a racist attack, that her motives were racist. So when everybody came back from this conference in Russia, there was a line drawn, and women were basically told you either um, disenfranchise, reject Lynette - have no connections with her - whatever, or we were against you. It split the camp right down the middle. And the way - it was awful, you know, women who I'd lived with for like 3 years - mainly the more extreme, were suddenly, I don't know, um, enemies. You know, they'd verbally attack each other. They literally drove out anyone who didn't agree with, with the attack on Lynette.

That's so sad. I spoke to um, another woman who said that she had - similar research to you, and had found a similar trail of broken campaigns.

It just didn't make sense. They - not only did they call themselves Women for Housework, they had all different other names to try and encompass like, English Collective of Prostitutes, Winvisible - all these different groups were the same core people, but with different names. And when I worked for Duncan, you know, we talked to people from other campaigns that they've gone in and disrupted.

Who is Duncan, sorry?

Um, when I left Greenham, I went to work as a researcher for Duncan Campbell at The New Statesman. And that resulted of stuff I'd been doing at Greenham, that I'd passed on to him. Um, and there was also anomalies - where they got the money from? Why they didn't seem to be drawing police attention or, you know, it just didn't, there was something that just didn't add up. And I remember, Duncan actually

spoke to people when he went to the States who'd been involved with like, some of the women who founded Wages for Housework. And they hinted that there was more to it. But they weren't willing to go on record. So yeah, it was awful. And that really heralded the end of Yellow Gate as it had been - it became something different.

But Greenham didn't stop at all?

It didn't stop. No, Blue Gate, and Orange Gate continued well on, you know, I mean, myself, and a lot of women moved to Orange Gate or Blue Gate, after leaving Yellow. But I began to start spending more time away from camp after that. But the worst thing for me was, I remember a meeting was called a Green Gate, to try and discuss and work out what was going on. And we - women came from all the different gates, and we all sat in a circle, and Wages for Housework were there, and that, and it was horrible. It was personal attacks, on particular women. And the particular woman who, who they went for the most was Rebecca, because they saw her as a star - because she had access to media. And they basically did a witch hunt against Rebecca - 'Either, you come on side, our side? Or we'll, we'll, whatever.' And what was so awful, was that it was so aggressive, and so intimidating. That we didn't, we didn't stand up and go to Rebecca's defense, because we were terrified. You know, and that's one big regret - I really wish I'd stood up and, and, and said there and then, you know, this is what you're doing. This is a witch hunt, because they were - the Wages for Housework and the women who became part - on side, they were constantly accusing other women of having a witch hunt. But it was about power. It was about power and influence. And they saw Rebecca that either she'd go onside, or they'd destroy her. And it was ugly. It was horrible.

That sounds that sounds horrible. I wonder if it's interesting to - unless there's, and feel free to come back to this, if anything else occurs to you, because it's such a big area of the history of it. I wonder about just going back for a minute to - and it might be that it's before your time, by the sounds of it. But I was wondering about sort of the beginning of the of

the camp, and what had actually originally, in the first place, initiated it in being - to be a woman only space? Were you involved in those decisions, or did you hear anything about those decisions?

I heard about them. Um, obviously, you know, the camp had started in '81, with the march from Wales. And it hadn't initially began as women only but it became women only. And I think a lot of the reasons for that was because women wanted to make links with other women. They wanted to practice non violence, they wanted to have autonomy, they wanted um, to be empowered. And women felt they couldn't do that in a mixed setting. Because I mean, lots of women who were involved with Greenham have been involved with over campaigns about over subjects that were mixed. And they'd so often been talked over, or not empowered. So I think that's where the organic reason to make it - to try and see if we could do it women only. I mean, there was a lot of opposition of it being women only by men and women. Some women said 'No, we don't want anything to do with it if it's going to be women only.' And a lot of men, our husbands and partners, and friends couldn't, - wouldn't accept, they saw it as as a direct threat to their masculinity, their patriarchal beliefs and values. You know, it really, it really questioned patriarchy, I think, in this country for probably the first time since the Suffragettes.

I used to help run a Reclaim the Night march in London. And you'd get outraged men turning up cause they'd been left out.

Yeah.

And sometimes girlfriends championing how much we'd hurt their boyfriends feelings. And that was such a microcosm. Imagine the whole it being this - this whole camp that lasted for years and years. And it's amazing, really, that it never, it never changed, it never gave it gave way on that ground.

The only time I actually had a problem with it being women only, was that some women were quite um, committed to separatism or whatever,

kind of drew a line about women being able to bring their children - male children. They made kind of an age cut off. And I didn't like that. Because I knew women who'd brought their children, male children, whatever. And they'd been great, you know. They, the young boys were learning themselves more about, um, about women about, you know, it was a nurturing for them. And I had a problem because some women literally felt they couldn't come because they couldn't bring their children.

There is um, I was a, so I remember going to, very early memories of going to Embrace the Base, and other women, and men, men and women actually have come forward and said 'Oh, I was a Greenham baby', or whatever, and I wondered if you - what you felt like the legacy of Greenham, or how was the experience of being a child at Greenham do you think - what was the sort of way it worked?

Well, when I first went to Greenham, Sarah and Arlene had got born at Greenham - he was the only child ever born at Greenham. I liked Sarah and Arlene, immensely. I used to go into town to the cafe for egg and chips, whatever. So I was really sad when they left. And I often wonder how, how that time at Greenham, that, that backstory, how Jay feels about it now all those years later. And I remember that there was an undercover reporter at Yellow Gate for a certain amount of time, and we didn't know about it. And she went off and wrote a horrendous article, saying that Jay was basically mistreated, really. By - you know not, not cared for. And oh god, that ripped through Sarah and Arlene, it really did. But now I think...

Who was that journalist working for, which paper?

I can't remember now, going back.

Was it a tabloid?

Yeah, it was a tabloid.

How horrid.

Typical tabloid.

Because they were treated very badly - the Greenham women by particularly the Sun weren't they?

Oh god. Yeah, I mean constantly - level that we were all lesbian, or we're all aggressive, confrontational. And yeah, we were all of those things, but much more besides, you know what I mean - that was what they wanted to see and portray.

So it's almost as like we were saying about the negative campaigning that split the gates, taking all the worse things and amplifying those.

Yeah.

Rather than looking at the context. And yeah. Did you have any other experiences of journalists - did that, positive or negative?

Positively, um, Janie who worked for the Morning Star. She was brilliant. Um, she was the first get to, get go to. Because I, increasingly as part of the actions that I took play, part in, we removed documents and whatever - took photographs, whatever. And built up quite a relationship with Janie, because she would be probably the, the only journalist who would actually go on and print regardless of being told not to. I mean, remember, one document we got out, we took it around the press, and no one would touch it. It was like a hot potato. Whether there'd been a D-notice put on it, we don't know. But Janie Hulme would run it. And that's how I first got contact with Duncan, because Duncan would would run it.

Wow.

Um, but the rest of the papers, even left wing papers like the Guardian, you know, still, we still had that prickly relationship.

How did the - I'd love to know how you, how the nonviolent direct action worked, I'd sort of like to ask you to explain it, I suppose. And then also tell me about actions related to that, that you, that you did.

Firstly, I don't think that NVDA, nonviolent direct action is easy. I think you actually have to really work at it. I don't think it's, I mean, we were saying about men being more aggressive. But even as women, your reaction to be roughly treated or whatever, you have to, you have to have a quite a high degree of control. And that's learned.

So, so break it down for someone who's never come across the idea before. Because I know what you mean, because I remember actually being again, being a kid in workshops where Greenham women trained my parents, so that they could - in NVDA, to go and do actions and get arrested and things. But that's completely outside the scope of what most people - so most wouldn't even know what non-violent direct action really is at all.

I guess for me it built on principles put forward by people like Martin Luther King, or Gandhi, and early Suffragettes. Whereas you wouldn't, you wouldn't use aggression or violence in your interaction with anyone. So if you're being dragged out the road by a policeman, you'd go limp. But you, but it wouldn't, you wouldn't - yeah, it's a hard one to describe. It's, it's a way of being where you don't violate. So you concentrate on your inner strength. And your beliefs, and they come foremost and non-violence is something that you believe in wholeheartedly. How can you fight the war machine with aggression? You can't - it's, that's the very thing that you're, you're fighting against. So non-violence makes a statement. But it's also a way of life. And I think that's learnt, and it's not something that you just automatically - it's not a position. It's an actual organic way of living.

It must become habit forming, because you're analysing your behaviour, and the other people's behaviour. And then that becomes an applied code of conduct almost, isn't it - I imagine.

But I look back at my own actions, and some of them make me cringe. Because I actually feel that I was at a point in my life where I hadn't worked through a lot of baggage. And when I went to Greenham, I wasn't as politically aware, I wasn't as articulate as a lot of women I was living with. So I felt, even though I was like in the midst of a crowd of women, I still felt very much alone. And for me, when I started to take part in NVDA, that became my vocabulary. That was my way of expressing myself. And because of that, I maybe threw myself into it too much. I was maybe at times reckless. Um, but it was my vocabulary for a long time.

Because there is an aspect to NVDA - correct me if I get any of this wrong wrong - but the way you, you are, it would be not, in certain circumstances, it wouldn't be violating the belief system to cause criminal damage to property would it?

Yeah, but even that would differ.

Yeah.

I mean, I believe that criminal damage was a means to an end.

And what was the, what was the end - were you trying to get people to know what the secrets of the camp were?

It was, it was to challenge the military. To disrupt. But I didn't feel it was in a - I didn't feel criminal damage was aggressive in itself. It depended on what the - your motive. And yet some women did have problem with with criminal damage. It's funny because they had no problem with cutting a hole in the fence. But painting a slogan. But I think a lot of women worked through that. And, and did actually agree with criminal damage in the end. But you know, there were differences of opinion. I mean, there was huge debate at camp about um, the first time that they cut the fence and went inside the base. You know, was that something we should be doing? Shouldn't we be just blockading? Some women

didn't agree with pulling the fence down, they saw that as aggressive. You know, there were differences in opinion about so much.

It's also interpretive, isn't it? As all action is. And did you, and so you talked about going and stealing some documentation - how did you how did you do that? (Laughs).

That, that came later. And actually the first time I removed a document was from Aldermaston because I'd - in '86, I became really interested in Aldermaston - its history, you know, CND and whatever. But the fact that it was still designing a new, new forms of nuclear deterrence. So I started doing actions at Aldermaston and eventually, and we formed the Aldermaston women's Campaign. We started regular camps outside Aldermaston. And we'd done an action in there once - stop me if I'm going on.

No, no, not at all, this is fascinating. This is great.

But we'd done criminal damage. There were three of us, we'd done criminal damage. We are covered in paint. Got arrested, put in this one room. While we're in this one room, I heard this WPC saying 'Oh, how do we deal with these protesters?' And a male colleague said 'Oh, you're to sign out standing orders. That explains it.' Then we were moved into another room, and bare room with a table and drawer, whatever. Well, my two friends went to sleep. I was looking in the drawer and came across this standing orders, that she'd obviously signed out to read about how to deal with protesters. Well, we'd already been searched, so I thought I wonder, so I put it in my bag along with my coat and that, and eventually I was called out first to be charged. So I was taken through, charge was read out, whatever. And then they were gonna release me. I said 'Can I get my bag?', and get out the gate. Got up the road. There was a camp - a demonstration, mixed demonstration taking place. Managed to cadge a lift back to Greenham. But while I'd been in the other room being charged, one of the other women who was left in the room had put a policeman's hat in my bag. So I got back to Greenham with this bloody policeman's hat in my bag, as well as this

document. Went inside the bender, started to show the women the document I'd nicked, police come charging out of Yellow Gate, jump on me, arrest me for theft of the policeman's hat. So while I was under arrest, they discovered that the document had gone. And thankfully, the women at camp had gone and photocopied it immediately. So it was too late. And they held me for hours and hours. And it was - they took it quite seriously. I mean, there wasn't that much sensitive information in that document. But it was embarrassing for them.

It's - um, you mentioned earlier that your, that you had a healthy distrust of male authority. Did being at Greenham change that? Did it make you feel better, or more questioning about - what were the relationships like with the men that you would have come across at camp?

I, and this was something else that divided camps. I didn't feel comfortable - whereas I approved of criminal damage and whatever, I shied away from confrontation - direct confrontation with squaddies, MOD police, men who came to the camp who didn't agree. I didn't like - I believed that in order to win hearts and minds, you had to have dialogue. So bit by bit - because I did so much direct action, I couldn't help but form sort of rapport with particular officers who I came into contact with time and time again. And a lot of women had a problem with that. They believed that that was a line that you shouldn't cross.

Us and them sort of thing?

Yes. The us and them. And I didn't agree with that. I believed that if you wanted to affect change, there had to be dialogue. You had to put your case across, and explain why you felt that way. You had to listen to the way they felt, and try and you know, politicise. And, and I'm glad I was like that. And there were other women like that as well, who didn't just see people who we came across who didn't agree with us as the enemy as such, but as people.

I definitely remember my Mum - that being a thing. And I think other women, I was definitely brought by part of what I thought - my

understanding of the agenda for some people involved in NVDA was that was quite, quite consciously part of it. That you try to break down a sense of us and them, so that they couldn't apply that to you as well. So it was harder for them to be cruel to the women as well.

And actually it bore through for me personally, because when the convoys started going out on Salisbury Plain, and we became active on Salisbury Plain. We were becoming a big thorn in the military's side. And I did an action with some women, and we were really physically manhandled into the backs of vans. And when we were processed, I was left to last. I thought oh, you know - I was taken in and I was charged with assault on a WPC - which never took place, it just did not happen. And I was incredibly upset about it. We got back to Greenham, and I was on other actions inside Greenham. And I got chatting to some of the MOD policemen about this charge.

While you were there illegally?

While I was there illegally. Yeah.

Brilliant! (Laughs).

In Greenham. And they were sympathetic. And they were shocked that I'd been charged with assault. And two of them - a sergeant and a constable contacted me and said 'We're willing to come to court. We're willing to stand up and say of our interactions with you, that we've never experienced violence.' And, and they actually did - they turned up at the court case in uniform.

Wow.

Stood up and did character references for me, basically . And that court room was full of Wiltshire MOD police officers in uniform. And there were two Greenham MOD police officers in uniform. And the case got thrown out, I was exonerated. No, I didn't only have those two as witnesses, I had women who were on that action who hadn't witnessed

an assault. And also the way that the charge itself, the way they said it happened, couldn't have literally happened physically. Um, and then later, in 1986, I was involved in a really serious car accident. It was at a time when I was on bail, stating that I couldn't live at Greenham, so I was living at a women's place in Henley on Thames. But when the convoys were coming out, we travelled back to the camp. And we were driving back late at night, because the convoy was due out. And we were driving on country roads outside Reading, went round a blind bend, and a farmer had left a hay truck with no lights or reflectors. And we couldn't avoid it. So my side, the front caved in on me, and I broke both my legs. And I was trapped for like 2 odd hours with fire brigades to come and get me out, whatever. And a message was relayed to the police at Greenham. Now the convoy was coming out that night. So things are quite tense when the convoy's due out, but they sent someone down to the camp, to tell the camp about the accident. And that I'd been taken to Reading, and, and while I was in hospital - because I was in hospital for quite some time, I got get well cards from the Ministry of Defense, police Greenham common off individual officers and their families, you know. So for me that, that reinforced how I felt. And I remember another woman I knew at Greenham, who also worked in that way. She actually got invited by one - a police officer to go and spend Christmas Day with him and his family. She didn't. But you know, the invite was there. And when I came out of hospital and visited camp, you know that they - their attitude, you know, they - yeah, we weren't friends. But...

It's almost like you were colleagues, weirdly.

We had a working relationship.

Yeah. How amazing. And that's about the duration, I guess of time that you spent, but also, as you say, it's about your way in which you dealt with them. And that brought out the best, the best side of them that was possible by sounds of it.

Yeah. I mean, you wouldn't just be talking about nuclear weapons and your feelings about war you, you'd end up talking about all sorts of different things. Just interaction.

Yeah. You did go to prison though, didn't you as well, because I've read some of your diaries from Holloway. And I think from another prison as well.

I, my first time I went to prison, I was absolutely terrified.

I would be.

I think because I had all those stereotypes in my head about what the other women were going to be like, what the officers were going to be like, was I going to be bullied like I'd been bullied by girls when I was in care? And as soon as I got to prison, all that was just obliterated - all those stereotypes. Yeah, there were aggressive women. But there was no stereotype of what a woman prisoner was like. And I found I could relate to these women, because they'd had similar backgrounds to me, that a lot had gone through extreme poverty, or domestic violence, or abuse as children. They'd, they'd been forced into committing offences because of the conditions that they were living in. And not only that, women in prison, women who went before the courts were punished on two levels, they were punished for the offence that there was - they'd committed, but they was also punished because they were seen by the male patriarchal system as having betrayed their sex - as having betrayed femininity. So you'd find that women got sent to prison for offences, quite minor offences, that men wouldn't receive a custodial sentence for - like shoplifting, prostitution, non-payment of fines. But when I first went to prison, I had all those stereotypes in my head. Um, and as I went to prison more and more often, that's when I think the seeds of disillusionment with Greenham started, because of the stark contrast between Greenham women in prison, and other women prisoners.

Okay.

And how I felt - not all Greenham women by any means - but a lot of Greenham women who went to prison, saw themselves as political prisoners. And didn't acknowledge that the vast majority of women in prison were political prisoners. And there was a demarcation between Greenham women, and the other women prisoners. A lot of that was broken down, the more often women went to prison. But it was still there. And I remember that the last ever sentence that I served, that was 4 months - I'd actually left Greenham it was well over a year since I'd left, when I was gone back into education. And the court case came up, and we got 4 months. But that last sentence, I got moved out to a semi-open prison, while my co-defendant stayed at Holloway. And I found myself scrubbing floors beside this, this, this black woman prisoner, who I knew from the care system in Sheffield. You know, I'd met her in a Remand Assessment Centre when I was 12 years old. And here I was in prison alongside her - it, it and I stopped, and I made - I formed bonds with other women at that prison, who made me question erm specifically, class, I suppose, in a lot of ways. But I started to I mean, from early on that first time I ever went to prison, the first time I ever went to prison, I got sent to prison with an older woman - we hadn't taken part in the same action, but we'd both been sentenced. I'd got 7 days, she got 14 days, we shared a cell. Oh, god, she snored! And she wouldn't come out of the cell to mingle with other women, even in association, even on exercise. And I saw that so often. I saw, when other Greenham woman were in prison, if we went out and exercised there'd be a, we'd stick, you know they'd stick together, they wouldn't be interacting.

Was that fear, do you think?

No. I'm not sure it was.

Or slight snobbery?

Yeah. I'm not sure it was fear. Because, yes, there was bullying in prison. But there was often not that much bullying in prison. And lots of

women learnt so much from other women prisoners about their lives, and what they've had to - they've gone through, whatever. And you didn't think to yourself in another life, and, you know, I could be - and I particularly felt that because of the amount of kids who'd been through the care system, like me, who ended up either in prison, or in the military, you know, total institutions.

Yeah.

Um. So, it, the more and more I went to prison, the more and more I related to the other women easier than I related to the women at camp.

Did any of the women that you met in prison ever come to camp?

Yeah, I remember meeting a young woman when I got sent to Bullwood Hall. And she turned out to live near Newbury. And when she got out, she came up and visited camp. And that very last sentence of 4 months - when I got out, I stayed in touch with one of the women I'd become really close friends with. And she, she invited me to her family home, and I met her family, her kids, and we stayed in touch for quite a while. And also early on in my time when I started going to prison - I was held on remand for quite some time, because I kept breaching the conditions of my bail. And because I had lots of court appearances, and I'd gotten to know a lot of the women, I was on remand with, I used to smuggle out their stories. And that's how I made contact with an organisation called Women in Prison, and started working with them to get publicity about women, individual women's stories, and about things that were happening within prisons.

So much of this really does - there are so many parallel stories, to, to some Suffragettes going to prison, not all again, but becoming class aware, and taking on prison reform when they come out as well.

I mean...

Do you see...

Yeah, I mean, towards the end of my time at Greenham, and when I left Greenham I became drawn towards penal reform and campaigns about specifically women's imprisonment.

Do you see sort of other parallels? I suppose do you see both, both positively like that, and perhaps negatively, like we were saying earlier with the, the politics that were used to, to split Yellow Gate - do you see any of these kind of campaigning tools at use in in the world now? Do you see any ways in which Greenham is - any kind of, any kind of campaigning or political sides of Greenham now in action, sort of thing? Or do you think it was pretty much condensed and contained in this specific space and time?

No, I mean, lots of women when they left Greenham kind of went in all different directions. But nearly all of them became involved in, in specific political, whether it was grassroots, um women's refuges, domestic abuse, whether it was involvement with, with campaigning about Latin America. I mean, after I left Greenham I shared a flat in London with two other Greenham women - one Naomi, spent more and more time in Nicaragua, and she became really involved in that. The woman spearheaded the Peace Tax campaign. So Greenham women took what they learned at Greenham, and built on it, and took it into a huge spectrum. I mean, I remember something that was quite important while, while I was at Greenham, were the links we made with like, the miners' wives, and how they politicised us in ways, and we politicised them in ways.

How did, how did you cross paths with them? Did they come to actions, or did you go and support strikes?

I think it was a bit of both. But I think we, we did make a conscious effort to go to, to pickets, and, and to make links. And these were women who'd been at the sharp end of patriarchy in a lot of ways, very male dominated communities, where they'd been suppressed. And they were finding their own voice through campaigning against pit closures,

and about what it was putting them through, um on a social and economic level. And I think, especially from Yorkshire, I went back to Yorkshire quite a lot during that time, and went to pickets, because the kids home I'd lived in was quite near to, like pit towns. And while I was there, I saw the masses of police vans going to Orgreave and whatever. So I felt quite strongly about that. But I remember going to these pickets and trying to talk to a lot of the men. And they were horrified by us, though initially they were horrified, horrified by lesbianism, about - by women only, you know, that - it - they saw that as a challenge as a threat, you know, to their....

To the core of how they lived?

Yeah, that we were, what's the word? That we were making inroads into their society, and corrupting - you know, but then there were a lot of men involved with, with pit strikes who, who did - were favourable.

Were there any male allies at the camp? Because we got an email from a chap who did regular food and fuel runs, I think. was that a sport of..

Yeah, I mean, we got...

Was that general?

Yeah, we got a lot, I mean, it was problematic at times, because some women said 'We don't want men come into camp at all, you know, it's a no go area.' So there was friction. I mean, I was guilty of it, too. At one point, when Cruise Watch started, which was a mixed group that had been started by women who'd had quite a lot to do with Greenham, there was a degree of animosity between some Greenham women, myself included at first, and mixed actions in that they shouldn't be getting too close to Greenham - you know, if they stuck to Salisbury Plain if they did, you know, followed the convoys, or whatever, that was fine. But they had to keep their distance...

From the camp?

But as time....oh, but as time went on, we started working with them...

(Something happens to recording equipment)

You'll have to hold that thought in the microphone. (Laughs). Thank you. So you started to work with them, and that was Cruise Watch. And that was a mixed...

A mixed campaign.

And what made it different? I don't - I've, this is my ignorance, now, I've only ever heard it in a sentence as if it was part of Greenham, but clearly it's different thing?

It was, it grew out of Greenham.

And what did it do specifically - what was its job there?

It was set up specifically to follow, track and disrupt cruise convoys, when they were taken down to Salisbury Plain. Because the Americans propagated that they would, that these convoys would melt into the countryside, in the, in the, in the case of a war, they would be deployed. They'd hide in a copse of trees, and nobody would know that they were there. So if there was a nuclear, nuclear strike on, on England, on Greenham, they'd be able to fire back because no-one would know. So Cruise Watch - and they were incredibly skilled, in the end, they tracked those convoys, they disrupted them on Salisbury Plain, they let everybody know exactly where the convoys were. They'd walk through like the military - they'd trespass, they'd make their way towards the copse of trees where they were hiding. You know, they'd be arrested by soldiers, they caused havoc. They were such a thorn in the military, especially the American's side. I mean, I remember breaking into Greenham once, getting into a hangar and sitting in the cab of a one of the vehicles - didn't have missiles or anything on it, but I remember there was, there was something hanging in it, and some quotation

saying 'Kill a Cruise Watcher today and score so many points,' something, something along that lines. They hated Cruise Watch, I mean, they hated Greenham women, but they hated Cruise Watch as well equally - the Americans.

Were the Americans very different to the MOD?

Yeah, you found the Americans much more aggressive. Um, it was much harder to, not to react to that aggression because it was extreme. I remember being really badly, rough handled by American soldiers. Whereas the British soldiers they might not be sympathetic, but they had been told how they should behave. And most most times they, they, they, you know, followed that. There were instances with British squaddies. I mean, it would be stupid not to know that there were, but - and I remember one instance while I lived at Greenham, two women from Yellow Gate set up a temporary camp between Yellow and Green gate beside the fence. And they were there alone one night, and the lights along the fence went out, and they were attacked by men in balaclavas with, with clubs, and they were badly beaten - they both got taken to hospital. And it was a British squaddie who witnessed part of it who actually called the ambulance and police, whatever. The men who attacked them never spoke. Until this day, we think they were American soldiers, basically.

How awful.

There really was a difference between the British squaddies and the American.

There are quite a few accounts of um, of soldiers on the base, like exposing themselves to the Greenham women, or keeping them awake by shouting really lewd and disgusting stuff at them. Would that, that wouldn't have been the MOD - that would have been the Americans, presumably?

That would, I would have thought probably more likely to be the Americans. I think they, they saw that they were even more affronted by women challenging patriarchal, than British squaddies. I don't know maybe that's an assumption on my part. The gung-ho attitude, you know, we're the big we are helping Britain out and look what how they're repaying us, you know?

Yeah.

It was that cocky attitude that - I mean, I remember a woman American um, soldier - we staged, two of us had staged a demonstration up a water tower. I remember this American woman soldier stood at the bottom saying 'Jump you cows, jump!' (Laughs). And you know, you wouldn't have got that off a woman squaddie, British squaddie or woman WPC MOD officer.

I wonder if there's something as well about just not being on the home turf, not being accountable?

Yeah.

Not having - you're in a system of anyone looking at you or holding you to account, the system's far away.

I mean, I remember one night, we got found by an American soldier outside the control bunker. And we were sat in the front of a Humvee vehicle, and they were very protective of their vehicles, you know, toys for the boys. He went crazy. And he dragged me out really roughly. And I really kicked off when I was arrested, I wanted to know his name, his, his number - I wanted to push for a complaint against him. You couldn't, you couldn't touch those American soldiers. They, they, they could get away, you know, with, with badly treating you because they weren't held accountable.

Because you could, again, I can remember my parents being taught to be observers, for mass arrests. And you could couldn't you - the British

police would have name the number on them. And they had to give you the names.

Yeah. The Americans...

Nothing.

No, no, that they weren't accountable. I mean, there was always, I mean, it never happened. But I remember when Hessletine visited Greenham. And when the missiles were actually inside Greenham in the silos. There were fences and fences around the silos, you know, three lots of fences. And the American soldiers on - in the inner sanctum were told that if women ever broke through that inner sanctum, there will - I think it was called an orange card policy or something - they could if, if pushed actually shoot. If, if women actually got through that inner, the most inner thing. Whereas it never happened, but if you did get close to the silos on an action, you'd see Americans pointing their guns at you. But you'd see British I mean, in the early days, you'd see British squaddies pointing guns, you know. I mean, when I first went to Greenham there were squaddies who used to patrol that whole of the outer fence. I mean, it was nine miles round. But they gave it gave up after so many years, because it wasn't feasible, they could afford to keep. So they - in some ways gave up.

Is that what happened with the bailiffs as well? Because that must have cost them a fortune . I was speaking to some women who said that bailiffs were coming every day, several times a day, for months.

Every day, several times, oh the bailiffs were, do you know, I think I had more contempt from the bailiffs than I did almost anyone else I came across.

You certainly get that feeling when you watch Carry Greenham Home, you're like there's nothing redeeming about them at all.

They were awful. They took pleasure. You know, in the - I mean, that's why the Quakers develop these getaway tents because the bailiffs would come and anything that you didn't have - anything left on the floor for a minute, they would take and put in that muncher. And I remember one day, Rebecca had hold of a piece of wood, and we had little wood at that particular time, and she wouldn't let go of it. And a bailiff had hold of the other end. And they went put it in the muncher and Rebecca, you know, steadfast, you know 'I'm not letting go of it'. And they turned it on and it caught the top of her hand, and she fought tooth and nail to get them accountable for that.

Were they? How could they possibly not be?

Do you know, I never to this day, I don't know what the eventual outcome was. Because I'm pretty sure she ended up actually taking civil action against the bailiffs for that. But they were awful - they were, you couldn't form any kind of dialogue with the bailiffs. Because their sole intent was to disrupt and demoralise. But it didn't work. You know, we, we found ways, you know, to challenge them. We'd be alerted by people saying 'Oh the bailiffs are on their way', so we'd have a good 10 minutes to get all our stuff together, and we'd cross cross over the road, they'd go, we'd move back - whatever. And sometimes they'd come back an hour later just...

Who would alert you? Other camps or residents?

Other camps, and local supporters.

How did you find the locals? How was the relationship with the locals?

It was a difficult one, because - especially in the early days, or throughout my time at Greenham, Newbury - we were barred from shops, pubs, cafes, god knows what. I mean, I remember one Christmas trying to get a bottle of wine, and couldn't find anywhere I could get a bottle of wine. There'd be notices in pub windows say 'No Greenham women or gypsies'. We were barred from the Little chef. So there was a

national campaign against the Little Chef, and they gave in in the end. But there were particular places in Newbury, where we were welcome. Like, there was a cafe called The Empire, which still going today, is still run by the very same people. Still that same character about it. The Quakers were incredibly supportive. They actually built that into the back room of the Quaker meeting house, so that we had a shower and a washing machine and a dryer. So women could go there and, you know, clean themselves up and whatever. But lots of people, lots of local people who were opposed to the camp, were opposed to it for many different reasons that they felt threatened by the women. They didn't like the fact that we smelled of smoke, you know, that they felt we were uncouth, you know, it was quite a right wing area.

It was a very military family area wasn't it?

Yeah. They were quite proud of having the Americans there, you know.

Yeah. Did - how did you deal with the practicality, just that how did the camp run day to day - like how did things like, I don't know, washing or periods? Or like was it - you don't have to tell me if it's too personal, but just like was there a sort of system?

There was routines. You know, I remember digging shit pits, that was one of the first things I probably remember - um digging shit pits, collecting wood. Doing the food shop, going to money meetings, because we had money meetings every week where representatives of all the different camps met to to allocate money. Like if there were women from abroad, living at camp and they obviously had no income, they couldn't access benefits, then they'd get camp dole, you know.

That's a brilliant idea, I didn't know there was camp dole.

Yeah, you'd be - depending on how much money we had in the kitty, it'd be allocated for actions that were put forward that needed bolt cutters or paint, or, you know, it was very democratic, even though there were those layers of difference. It was a democracy in its purest.

And in its resources by the sound of it?

Collecting water, you know, we fought for the right to be recognised as a valid address, which we actually were - we got mail delivered. Um we paid, I think, for a while we paid water rates so that we could use standpipes on the water. You know, it - there was that a routine.

And did you um...

And one thing I do remember that I really, really appreciated when I was at Greenham was they set up a network of local groups that in the winter would, would come round with a van and provide meals. And they were a lifesaver, you know they'd be vegetarian friendly meals, because quite a few women were vegan as well. So there'd be a vegan option, and the effort they put into providing the, that, you know.

Would that have been local residents?

It was local peace groups, mainly - Quakers or or anti-nuclear groups. Often mixed you know, there'd be guys driving the van and whatever. And, and the Quakers in particular with their emphasis on peace - they were incredibly supportive. You know, there, they were the local Quakers regularly held what's the word? Not worship but...

Services?

Yeah. Particularly at Blue Gate they used to.

That's interesting, 'cause I know there was a lot of Quakers at Green Gate for example.

(Edit in tape).

And so you were saying about the stigma of mental health at camp?

There was, there was a stigma of mental, mental health really, really was. And all - whilst there was this solidarity, that we were all the same, in that we were women, in that we had shared political beliefs and moral values, and whatever - we didn't, we didn't spend a huge amount of times talking about our lives before Greenham. And I don't think, I can't remember ever, sitting down and talking, whilst I was at camp about being in care.

I'm really surprised to hear that - I sort of assumed that you would share your previous experiences, and that would be politicising part, politicising yourselves and the shared experience.

Yeah, we were all on about this personal is political. But it was almost like (sighs) - it, it was different - it was, we did share things we shared characteristics and personalities, likes, dislikes. But we didn't - there were still barriers.

Do you think that was to do with helping you all live together?

Probably.

Like if you went too close or too deep, it would be very hard to share such an intensive living condition?

Um (agrees). I mean, we supported each other through prisons, you know, writing letters to women in prison. We supported each other in many, many ways. But when it came to like, depression, or even though - I do remember kindness shown towards one woman in particular, who lived at Yellow Gate a long time. Who was really quirky - I mean, she was nicknamed Metal Micky, because she, she basically lived in the van that we all kept our stuff in. She didn't really spend much time around the campfire, she was very um, oh I can't think of the term - she was such a character. And people did think fondly of her whilst at Greenham, and after Greenham. But, but there were women who just - you could tell just couldn't, couldn't deal with mental health.

Do you think that was partly generational, this, this stigma?

Yeah, I think a lot of it was. Because I remember feeling it more from the older women than I did the younger women. And I think as well, that might have been something that was quite particular to Yellow Gate. I don't think maybe that was as evident at other camps. Because after the split, and I started spending more time at Orange Gate and building relationships with women who lived at Orange, getting and who supported Orange Gate, who I was in touch with after I left Greenham - some supported me through thick and thin after Greenham, when I did have a total breakdown, at Cambridge, some of them carried on supporting me. Whereas there were no women from Yellow Gate - well there was one that supported me.

I'm really interested in the fact that, as you say, you went on to work for the New Statesman, I think, after I guess you went to Cambridge University. How was that - was the reintroduction of those very different lives after Greenham and very different life than what you might have expected before Greenham. Was that quite a bumpy re-entry?

It was incredibly bumpy re-entry. I mean, I went to work for Duncan as a researcher, and I developed skills while I was at Greenham that made me particularly good at researching. And, and I was interested in areas that he was interested in - militarisation, secret services and all that sort of stuff. But at the Statesman, it was predominantly very middle class journalists who'd got degrees, and, and I felt there like I had at beginning of Greenham - I felt out of my depth. I felt I lacked confidence to articulate and whatever, and it was that that actually pushed me to the point where I went back into education, because I wanted to pursue it. And then Cambridge - I, it's crazy because I, I didn't respect institutions such as Cambridge, but at the same time that was like the Citadel power. And if you wanted to change things, where better than, than to embed yourself somewhere like that? And I was proud that I was the only person for my family to reach university.

And such a university as well. If there is, even if we don't approve of it, there is - it goes with a huge cache. And in some ways, if you're only measuring that form of intelligence we were talking about a minute ago, it's the highest cache for academic - you know, Oxbridge is the highest cache for that, for that it's kind of strand of of intelligence and testing that you possibly have.

I mean, I guess some women maybe saw me as selling out by doing that. I think I even questioned my own motives, you know, because I resented some women who left Greenham who managed to make a career out of being at Greenham. But at the same time, it opened doors for me, I would never have ended up at the New Statesman, I would have never ended up Cambridge without that background. Because what attracted the college that accepted me was that background, was that diversity, um, was what I'd learned at Greenham - that I could bring, like, to the course to the college. So yeah, it - but I think, the culture shock of coming from Greenham and then ending up at Cambridge, tipped me over, I had a breakdown at the end of my first year. And I think, I think it, it might have happened if I hadn't gone to Cambridge because things were building up. But I think it precipitated it.

What brought you out of that, then? Is there any Is there anything about the legacy of Greenham in your life that you think has been positive or that...

Hell of a lot, yeah, I mean, I don't regret for 1 minute, having gone to Greenham. It's one of the proudest achievements of my life. I feel honoured that I was able to do it, and I feel honoured about the vast majority of women I met there. Although I've been really critical, and - but I think that we owe it to ourselves and to Greenham to be critical, to say what the downfalls were, to say that racism and issues like that were our Achilles heel - that, that we didn't address issues like that. I think for me, Greenham was my university. It, I think I went there very much as a child. And I think that the way I threw myself into actions, sometimes being reckless, I was still that child. But I think, the effect of Greenham

and what happened after Greenham was actually my coming of age - it, it informed the rest of my life and how I wanted to live.

And why do you think it's important for Greenham to be remembered by subsequent generations?

I think on a whole number of levels I think it's so important that young women today have got examples of ways in which women have become empowered. You don't hear that much these days about consciousness raising about personal is political. Yes, there's a feminist movement. But is it like third wave feminism, you know, it - I just think that bedrock has, has got such a valuable, you know, I think it's such an important part of her-story. And, like, we've been celebrating 100 years of Suffrage, you know, it's in that same category, you know.

I totally agree. And the actions that you, that you organised at Greenham, some of them were as big as the, as anything that the Suffragettes, and that's been done since, and it radicalised a generation in the same way that the Suffragettes did.

And I think now more than ever - I haven't been politically involved as an activist for a long time. I've done campaign work around issues like mental health, women's imprisonment, whatever, I'm still connected with people on that sense. But if you look at the world, now - you look at Brexit, you look at Trump, you look at the rise of nationalism, popularism. You look at the way that people like refugees and asylum seekers are demonised, this culture of hatred. And I think is it about time that we once more became activists? I couldn't, I couldn't take part in NVDA anymore, I couldn't put myself in a position where I would get sent to prison. I couldn't no longer do that. Um, but I think the time is coming when we've got to regroup as women, young women, older women, mixed groups, everything. It's coming to the point where we've got to listen to our conscience and, and try and do something to affect change.

That's wonderful. Yeah, I totally agree. That sort of feels like a natural end for the interview. Um, because we have the power of editing, can I jump back and just ask you two other follow up questions from other things that you just talked about?

Yes, sure.

But that is a lovely place to sort of consider ourselves at rest. So we'll just do these other two and then I'll leave you alone. (Laughs). One was about the - I wanted to ask about how on a day to day level, like the money meetings, how sort of how conflicts were resolved amongst the women? Because the camp did rub along amazingly, actually, for years and years. How was that achieved? Um, and then I wanted to ask you about infiltration. So yeah, so in terms of like yeah day to day running of the camp and the meetings where things were organised - how did, women can't have all agreed with each other all the time?

Oh, no. I mean, I remember when I first went to Yellow Gate, at one point, there were three fires. There was one fire that had like the anarchist women from London - Sarah, Arlene, and whatever. There was one fire that had the predominantly older middle class women. And then yet another fire that was like the stragglers. (Laughs). So there were demarcations, and conflict - there was conflicts of opinion, and ways of doing things and that ever. But we sort of agreed to disagree. Um, and everything we tried as, as, as really hard to have, like a democracy so that everyone could have input. If there was a major demonstration or an action that was being planned women from all the gates would meet to hammer out how it should go, you know. There was resentment towards Yellow Gate, that, that was evident throughout because of this - we are the main camp, we are the main gate. But it was wonderful to be able to attend things like money meetings and whatever, and see that democracy in action.

Lovely. And so yeah, you mentioned that, you mentioned a journalist who infiltrated and wrote a very cruel and very...

Malicious.

Malicious. Yes, a deliberately malicious story. And so I was asking you whether you had - had you known she was a journalist, and you were saying, no - she actually did her part really, really well.

She lived there for a week, I think.

A whole week? Gosh, so how often did that sort of happen, like infiltration of either journalists or the state?

We don't know, we honestly don't know. Um, it has come to light, and is increasingly coming to light because is it 20 year rules about information, data, whatever. It is coming to light, that there were infiltrators living at Greenham taking part at Greenham. And I think we'll probably end up finding out who some of them were.

Did you get a sense, was there ever one where you did know, or you got a sense?

There were suspicions sometimes. And yeah, you can look back and you can remember, maybe particular women who always seemed to be like on the periphery of things - at meetings where we were discussing actions, or in the right place at the right time, who didn't physically get involved. And, and you think back and wonder. But it's a hard one because you don't want to feel that mistrust.

And the vast majority of women there would have been women like yourself, or women that were all hugely benefitting from being around women like yourself. So I guess that the, the good and the radicalisation and the consciousness raising totally...

Outstrips it.

Outweighs it. Yeah.

Oh, definitely.