

Annie Brotherton

So Annie, would you start by just letting us know, these are just prompts for me - we probably won't particularly use them but they're just fairly straightforward, if you want to stop anytime you just say, or ask anything you don't want to answer that's absolutely fine, just say I don't want to talk about that. And yeah, would you start by telling us how you how you came to Greenham, how you got there?

How we physically got there?

Either - both, anything you like!

Transported by aliens! Um, Penny and I went to drama college together. Rose Bruford. That's how we met. And then we did a bit of traveling in Europe and then we came back, and it was 1983 we went - the winter of 1983. um. I don't know if we'd been to - no, it was before Embrace the Base, we went in about October, me Penny and another woman called Kim. And we shared this tiny little tent, and I remember, because we got the train to Newbury, and so then you walk from the train station up to Blue Gate, it would be, because that was the nearest gate to the, to Newbury. And it was a time when it was quite popular. So we really supported by men and women, so there was a food tent there with loads of food and what have you, at that time. And I remember just being really nervous, and it was a fire, and I remember having chamomile tea and just going grossed out by it, you know what I mean? And, and it just felt a bit alien, although it was loads of women, it just thought you know, ooh, a bit out of my comfort zone. And then we got in the tent, the three of us, and it was the times when the police were doing - coming around the base, round all the sites, or the yeah, the sites. And I remember them unzipping the tent, and then shining a torch in the tent, and saying 'We're coming in to rape you.'

The police?

Yeah, I'd never had, you know, like you call them pigs and stuff like that. We went to drama college and it was a community theatre course we were on, so we're creating and devising, and it was all the time of the miners' strike. And that's remember, the clearest memory of oh, they are horrible, you know. Um. And so we just went for the one night, but then we went back and that was the start of it really. Carried on going, so it was '83/'84.

What, what, why did had you, why did you decide to go in the first place? What was...

I think it had been on the news. It, well, it have been on the news a lot. And, and we'd gone to Europe for 3 months. But we'd had our stuff stolen, our rucksacks stolen, so we came back. So we'd got nothing planned. You know what I mean, and, and I think it was that, that comment by the police, and being wanting to do something, and had nothing else to do 'cause we'd finished college, so hadn't got any plans, so we just, me and Penny just carried on going.

That's interesting that they were trying to put you off, the police, and it actually made you go 'right'.

Yeah. Because you do, because I'm from quite a big family - five brothers and sisters, and Catholic, and never, never been in trouble or anything - once got told off by the police for picking daffodils, but they'd already been picked - they were in the park, so I was picking them up to take them to my grandma's, and he came over - so I've not had any inklings with the police, but that's really when it kicked off really. And then we were, we just went to Blue Gate all the time, the Blue Gate was the Northern gate.

Oh, was it? Tell us a bit more about Blue Gate - what was what, because all the gates have their own personality, don't they?

Yeah, Blue Gate was the northern gate, the one nearest the pub!

(Laughs). Oh really!

And yeah and it, because, it was a Northern gate was because it was where the train station was. So it was the first camp you hit if you coming by train. The Yellow Gate was a bit of a press gate, that's where they, and they were quite posh because that's, I don't know where it is, but posh land! It was easier to access the Yellow Gate. Green Gate was the women - older gate, you know a bit more what have you, but Blue Gate was the rowdy gate, and Blue Gate was the one that got most of the hassle. It was, it was it was right opposite the houses who were really in support of the, the base, and it had a huge big teepee, when we first got there, and and we all slept in the teepee. And then one, one night they - one of the neighbours came with a big Roses tin, you know, full of maggots and threw it into the - yeah, no, I mean you just you, and then they set it on fire eventually one night, and people were in it. And so we had to have um, stay up, we had like vigilantes - had to stay up all night to keep the fire, and keep the place safe.

Would you take turns to do that? Or was that sometimes visitors or...?

It was never visitors. Visitors sort of stopped - there was Embrace the Base and my sister came up for that. And then the visitors started to stop. Because the police now were putting out fires, they were just putting water on the fires, coming round putting out the fires, putting out the fires. The food stopped. It was stopped coming. And partly it was in response to the press were starting to say 'We're getting rid of the Greenham women'. So it went from tent, teepee, tents to benders, and then benders on wheels, so you could keep mobile, you could keep moving. Because they were just literally, they were sending what, what they called, like eviction orders.

The bailiffs?

Bailiffs (laughs). They were sending the bailiffs on a daily basis, but it was always Blue Gate. Because they were - that was the easiest gate, and Yellow Gate, was the one that - more famous, and eventually in

1984 they started saying they'd got rid of us, which is why we did the big mass action at the Easter time, where - I wish we hadn't done it, personally. That's the one with the photo - they organised loads of press, all the newspapers, and they'd bought out hundreds, hundreds of bolt cutters, wire cutters. So and we had to quietly, en mass, meet in the woods and stay there during the night. And the idea was you worked in pairs, and you got on each other's shoulders, because it was great big - what's it called wire?

Yeah.

And then behind it was three rolls that way, and three rolls that way of razor wire. So when you snapped it, it snapped back at you. Now I think we should have carried on pulling the green wire down, with and have it, have that between us to embarrass them. Because it was all on the outside - the perimeter fence, it was young 17/18 year old British soldiers, you know what I mean? When you're doing anything like removing the picket fence because now had no wood or anything, they're 'Please ladies, please ladies don't do that.' Know that I mean, because it's on their watch and they're 17. Just me and Penny once did that. We were doing the night watch and fire - this tiny little picket fence on our side. Know what I mean?

Yeah.

On our side, it was just surrounding this bench. And we went 'we're going to have to have that'. And this bloke, he was only about 17, 'Please don't, please don't,' and I said 'We've got no choice, we're freezing,' so we got it. So of course he had to ring up. Then the police came that morning, so we got arrested and taken down. As they do, we were alright, we were warm! And then we got sent to court. And Penny, I don't know why we did it, because we had really short hair in those days. But when people would come, they've got long hair - the visitors and we'd say 'Can we have a little bit of your hair?', and we'd then glue it on! For some bizarre reason. I had a beret, and I think Penny might of had a beret as well, with woollen plants pinned to the berets. And what

we did was when we got arrested, I was in stripy back and white tights and big jumpers, Penny was in stripy, red and white something. And so, we defended ourselves in the court. And we got all the women in camp, at our Blue Gate to wear berets and woollen plaits. And they were asking this poor 17 year old 'Now, (laughs). Are you sure it was us?' And he was going - it's just awful for him you know what I mean, so we got off with that one. But anyway, this one where it was en mass, I think it was Easter. Penny says it's Easter, she's got a good memory. And we worked in pairs, and I was on Penny's shoulders, and we were chopping, and then pulling and then how to get in. And so what happened then, the American soldiers who were in the base, because they're in the base, you know, there's schools in there, there's shops in there, there's everything, pubs - everything in there. And they came really angry. They were really angry, because now all the paparazzi was there, and women were just - we should have just kept going round and round the base - they would have had to come out to arrest us, because the police hadn't arrived by then. But we didn't, so we had to start snipping our way through, and of course once they got you, they just pulled.

Through the razor wire?

And then you had to do this flop, (laughs) you know what I mean?

Yeah.

Resistance, and so they're just pulling you on the gravel, and I could just feel me trousers ripping open, and then lifting you up, and throwing you in this van, so you're hitting everything as you go in. So there was loads of us got arrested.

Does it - were they particularly uncareful with you? It sounds like they were...

They were angry that you had the press there, that's the whole point was to say 'We women with nothing are humiliating you. You've got all this - cruise missiles, and you've got the silos, and you've got aeroplanes

flying in that we're painting. And we're going underneath and painting your planes.' You know what I mean. So it's, and the whole idea was to keep getting arrested, keep getting in, to keep, that was the aim of the game. That's why we were there.

And what was the point of the game? What was the...

To keep being in the press, keep saying 'Get out. This is common land. You know, we didn't approve this is, you know, Cold War America, Russia, you know, and we're humiliating, and we will carry on humiliating you with absolutely nothing, you know, boys and their toys.' So that was the aim. And that was the photo of that action. That was in the, in the Observer or the Guardian. So it was just, just me head and bolt cutters, but I can't find it. And then me sister rang me, New Year's Eve 1999 on the cusp of 2000, and it was in again, because it was that in the history or her-story of the last decade.

Iconic picture.

Yeah. And that's when I went to court, and they went oh drop it, not enough evidence! (Laughs).

So you went to, you, as part of this mass action, you were arrested and went to court. And they didn't convict you because there wasn't enough evidence even though your picture was in the newspaper. Wow.

I know. So the first time we went, me and Penny, when we stayed, we were going - went and signed on, that's what we did. We'd signed on, packed our rucksacks and went to Greenham until we had to go and sign on again. And I remember, when you first start getting dirty, it's horrible, you know what I mean, but then you get so used to it, and then you're having showers in snow, um, making it - like women holding things so you could actually just get a bucket water on you, and wash yourself. Um, and the first, so we went back again. And er, we were gonna do, we were gonna do this action. Get in and paint. So what they wanted to do was not be obvious. So they - we all got in a van and drove

to a, like a petrol station, service station, and we went to this service station, but somebody - or one of the tins of paint got knocked over. So quite apart from the fact that we're all getting out of the van with paint on bottom of our boats and walking into the service station with lime green paint, you know. When we got back in the van when it was dark to do the action - we got back in the van. Well, the van had a problem with its exhaust. So it's coming up the hill, and all you can hear it chug, you know, the sound of it, you know, an exhaust that's not working. It's just coughing. So, you know, hello, we're here. Do you know what I mean? We're just - and so they were ready for us. So we had to run off. We called it nine dykes in a ditch, because we all hid in this ditch, which they found us - 'cause I mean it's green paint all the way. So they found us and arrested us. So this is the first time I've been arrested.

Sorry, one second. Did you just put it on as well? (Recording equipment). Carry on, so they followed the green feet.

Well, I mean, we were so bloomin' obvious.

Nine dykes in a ditch!

Nine dykes in a ditch. And so we look up and there they are, do you know what I mean. So we get arrested, and obviously never been arrested before. Never been in police car before, but eight of them were put in one cell. And I was on me own. And so I was thinking what have those eight said about me? Thinking, you know 'She made us do it!' You know, it wasn't that.

Did they do that on purpose to mess with you a bit?

I don't know. Yeah, I don't know because you're interviewed, and you don't give your real name. Don't know what name I gave that time, um but you never give your real name.

Did you kind of - that sounds really kind of - I wonder how you knew not to give your own name and things. Did you coach each other a bit?

Well yeah, yeah. Yeah the ones that had been. Have you interviewed a woman can't remember second name - Chris. She lives in Hebden Bridge.

Possibly. We've have interviewed quite a few women from Hebden Bridge.

Oh right.

(Recording equipment) If you put it down next to it because mine is down.

But she, she, she actually sued them in the end for wrongful arrest.

Oh, really?

Yeah. And you'll find her in the middle of Hebden Bridge every Saturday protesting and about something. (Laughs). Um, and she came up - there was a Greenham thing happened here a few years ago, and she came up for that. Um, so yeah, you were told, you know, not to give your real name.

And she was one of the people who might...

She was always, oh, she was in that base every night, you know what I mean?

Really?

Oh, she got into - her and Kirsty Bradford got into the tower that you know?

Oh yeah.

The tower for guiding the planes.

Control tower sort of thing?

Sergeant Bilko, over the tannoy, named herself Sergeant Bilko, and what have you, know what I mean, so she lives, she lived around the corner. Her son now lives literally round the corner, the next street. That's how we met her. So a lot of the friends I have now are from Greenham.

Oh, fab.

So Lou from Hebden Bridge, Chris from Hebden Bridge, Penny, she moved she moved in with two women in Manchester from Greenham, so it's it's still very much you know, that bond is really - I remember when Trina, because I remember when me and Penny came back from signing on. I remember leaving, and being really embarrassed because you're getting on a train, and you just stink of woodsmoke you know, and you're thinking...blinking hell. But then when you get to London, and you get home, you don't want to take your clothes off. Because then you take clothes off, then you get in the bath and then you start thinking, what am I gonna wear? Whereas, it's how long can I be? Know what I mean? You didn't bother, but then you're suddenly getting back into that mindset of fashion and clothes, and you know, and it just, I didn't, we didn't want to get in the bath. 'Get in that bath!' 'No, no', and you know your clothes, you know, just big pile of - wash them, and then there they are, I'm wearing them again to go back. Um. So what else can I remember?

Can I ask you about the - you said when you arrived, and you were nervous, even though it was nearly all women? What was it - was it because there's a feeling that they knew each other, and you were new?

Probably though, we were new, and it was just the newness. And it was, by the time I got there, I think it was because it was winter, it was dark. You know, if you've been sort of somewhere, I don't know, I don't know, it was winter and it was dark.

Almost like the first day of school almost, like you're going into a new, and everyone else is there already.

And we all went to bed at the same time, that sort of thing, you know what I mean, and, and you're not quite sure, not quite sure if you should be there. Or if you were in their space, and then, then you sort of realised, well, where else would I be? As soon as we left, we went 'Well, that's it. We're going back. That's it we're going back.' Yeah, and then just keep getting in there, keep getting into trouble. You know, keep doing things.

And what sort of things did you paint under to the planes?

I can't remember now. I don't know if it was actually there. If it was one of the RAF, where they kept the planes. I think we just painted it, because once you've sabotaged it, they can't fly.

Oh, really?

Yeah. Because, yeah, if you've done, you've sabotage that. So they're not allowed to - but we never got caught for that, so it wouldn't have been in the base. Um, been in the base a few times, been arrested in the base. And was there the night that cruise arrived, which was absolutely terrifying.

Tell us a bit about that. Why was that so terrifying?

Because there was hundreds of police. And you could hear - you could almost feel the road, because it's sheer up the road, it's that like a really steep road from, and you could, and then the cruise arriving was just, it was, it was everything that you didn't want, everything. It was humongous. There was thousands of police. We tried to sit in front of the gate, at Blue Gate and they were just not having it, they were throwing you, and you kept trying to get there, and they were throwing you, and this just humongous unbelievable lorry, with this massive

missile you know, and it sort of - it was upsetting. (Becomes emotional).
Ooh, ooh!

You alright?

Yeah. That's funny that, and it was because it felt like we failed, or it felt like it was these men gonna have their way whatever. Whatever they were having control.

That is upsetting.

Um, but going back to Trina, when I remember once coming back from London and Trina had been sent down, and that was again, it was someone you knew, it was really happening - even though the aim was to be sent down. It was really you know god she's, she's 20, because we're all 20/21, we're all young.

Yeah.

And then I can't - I was sent down, but I cannot remember which I was sent down, but there was quite a few women had done this action. And it was six of us in court, and it wasn't Penny, so it must have been just randomly chose. And we were all in the dock, and they were all saying their names, and it's like Frida People, Frida Nation. They ran out of Fridas when it came to me, and I went 'fucking hell', and I just went Frida Bloggs - Frida Bloggs, Frida Nation. And I went down - got sent for a week to Cookham Wood. She'd been Cookham already, so she was all sort of like - it was, it was almost like the next steps. You know, you did the protest. And this is what - how you had to respond to it. And now this is the next level. You go, you're going to be sent down because I'm not gonna be you know, not going to pay me fine. You just say 'No I'm not going to pay me fine'. So the judge has no choice, but to send you down. So it was all about expense as well, know what I mean - you're costing Newbury, you're costing Newbury, and so went down to Cookham Wood, and Trina - there's Alexia as well, Alexis I think, and they got put in a cell together. And I got to put in a cell with this woman

had mental health illness, called - we called her Metal Carol, because when she was at Greenham, she was - clearly having mental health issues, and she objected to the the cruise, because she's in love with metal. So she objected to making bombs out of metal.

Oh, wow.

So she wore metal - she wore chains, and met - proper not you know, bits, and so dragged herself round Newbury you know kissing metal. So I was in a prison with her, so she would kiss the bars, kiss the beds, you know, didn't really communicate - but that's, that was her take on it. So I was in with her.

How did she deal with being in prison, and not being allowed to wear, presuming not wear all her metal?

We didn't really, we didn't really, she didn't really talk. It was you know, it was a long week. And I remember forgetting I was Frida Bloggs, so when somebody would say 'Bloggs', I just sat there then going 'Oh that's me!' Because they knew you were giving false names, but because you didn't have any ID, you know, you didn't have you bus pass with your photo on, or your driving licence, or whatever. So um, and I met my Myra Hindley in there. She taught me to knit, and I didn't know it was Myra Hindley 'til I came out. And I saw her name on the door.

Oh my god. And what was what was that like?

Well it was just the once that I went, because it was a bit like Myra Hindley - but she was nice. She was really religious. She was into Jesus, and that you were allowed to take knitting needles in there.

Wow!

So, I'd got these really big ones. And it was to make - we called them spider jumpers. Because when you make them, when you knit normally

these big like holes, do you know what I mean, just because needles are so big.

So it's more like web than close knit?

Yeah. So you can make a jumper. You know what I mean, while you're there.

And she helped you to do that?

Uh huh.

How bizarre. So what was the - did you, how long were you in?

Just a week. And then the second time with Penny, I was in with Penny, and that's for 2 weeks in Holloway.

How did the two prisons compare then - that's...?

Well, Cookham was new, it was clean. You were in your cell all the time. As Holloway, but Holloway, they're pulling - knocking it down now, Holloway apparently and making flats out of it or something. But um, it was old, and what happens is when you get in there - we knew we were going to be sent down, this is it now I think - Penny I wish she was here, I wish she'd stayed, then she could say no! Because it's just all gonna merge into one story that's not true. Know what I mean! Quite a few of us met one night in London - we knew we were going to go back to camp, and I think Penny and I knew we were going to be - we're in court and we were going to go down, because we've going to say 'We're not paying', and again, lime green paint - met in a pub in London, and somebody had got a van, and all the way up to Newbury, we painted the signage to Nukes-bury.

Oh, wow.

So we're absolutely covered, because you're on each other's shoulders again painting, know what I mean, all this lime, late at night, so there's all this lime green paint rippling. So got to camp...

And it was pretty obvious?

Well, because it was on the way up to London. So we went got into bed and it was those horrible, you know, like army blankets - those grey ones. So, by the time you got in the morning, it was just all this stuff stuck. Because...

Stuck in the paint, was it?

Yeah, I mean, we were just covered in it. So when we went in the dock (laughs), and then we went in - no, they didn't even guess...

Were you still covered in it by the time you got into court?

Well, yeah, there's nowhere to wash it off - you can't wash paint off. So yeah. And then there were police officers - we could hear them as we were driving down 'Look what they've done. Look what they've done'. (Laughs).

But they didn't know it was you?

Look what colour it is! So we got sent down for 2 weeks in Holloway.

But not for that, that just happened to be incidental?

Yeah, I can't remember, I can't remember. We got in and arrested so many, so many times - that's what I mean, Penny would know - she would go 'Ann, Annie'. Um, so what they do in Holloway is this strip search you as you go in, and then they put you in like a holding cell. So all the new people, or even people that have been in court come back to this holding cell. So it's a huge big room with lots of bunk beds. And I remember feeling a bit - well, feeling bit guilty, both in Cookham, and in

Holloway for, for actually choosing to be there. That sounds silly, because these women had no choice. These women had children, these women, had done, you know - and there was this mother and daughter, and the daughter was getting married. So the daughter was taking the mother out to um, for a meal, and the daughter was quite high up in um, it's the name of a in the '80s it was a restaurant that loads of people used to go to - had branches all the way around - can't remember what it's called, but it's like a steak bar.

Okay.

But anyway, but her, so she worked for them and her card had run out. You know, her works card for discounts it had run out, so she'd had to get a new one, but it was pointless getting a new one in her single name because she was going to get married soon. So she had it done in her married name. And when she came to pay and claim, they charged her - Bernie's, Bernie's Inn! (Laughs).

Well done.

Bernie's Inn, so they arrested her. This is about the seventh time they've been in and out - her and her mother as an accomplice - her mother was in her 80s.

This is madness.

And he dumped her, wouldn't have anything to do with her. The neighbours wouldn't have anything to do with them because you know, mother and daughter fraudulently and now taken into Holloway - they hadn't been, hadn't been in court, hadn't had the day in court yet.

So they were waiting for that.

But been out to see the solicitor or something, so they weren't - but that it was that sort of level of unbelievable-ness.

Do you know what happened to them?

No.

Gosh.

Gonna research mother and daughter...

I know!

And, and then we went into got put into a cell, I mean, luckily, I mean oh so luckily, me and Penny and this other woman - lesbian she was, who had, had hots for me. So which is why thank god that Penny was in that cell. And she was she was like, the biggest butchest, roughest lesbian you could imagine, and I was just terrified. At any point...

Because were you and Penny a couple at this point?

Yeah. I was absolutely terrified that at any point, you know, Penny would get taken to do something, or you - asked to clean or and that - because she'd suggested to Penny that she held me, Penny held me down while she got um, while she got the toilet roll handle thing from the toilet roll, so she wasn't even going to use her hand she was going to - so I was just sweating. And then she went to see her solicitor - she left her notes. We read the notes, and what she'd done was - I'm gonna get this wrong. I think her partner had wanting to finish with her or something, and she wasn't gonna let it happen. So she took her partner in the car somewhere, somewhere in a back street in London, stripped her naked, got the seat belt from the car and beat her so she had hundreds of stitches - dudl got food, especially a pudding - because I'm not really into sweet things - 'Do you want....' I can't remember her name - Cal, or Caz or something - 'Do you want me pudding?' Just anything to you know, horrible.

That must have been awful for you, and Penny, to try and work out how best to deal with her.

Yeah, 'cause she were - we were all there all together, most of all the time. Um, but yeah, Holloway was a grim, grim, it's like you see on the telly - it's like those really - It does look like that.

Yeah.

Whereas Cookham, not so - Cookham, I felt a bit embarrassed because it was one of their sort of like first, Greenham women - I think her name's Helen Jones.

Helen John?

John, is it?

Yeah.

She'd been into Cookham not long before, so, and hadn't made herself very popular. Because she's very posh. And, you know, she was demanding that she had The Guardian paper delivered...

That's brilliant!

'I have my rights', so, obviously everybody we all got paint with this, you know, paint brush - that we're all like Helen Johns. And you're here from choice, and you know what paper you're going to start demanding, you know what I mean? So it was a bit - she hadn't really ingratiated herself very well.

Um, what was - that, that's all absolutely, gosh it's fascinating. But I suppose - completely flip side of that is what was the sort of day to day life of the camp like? If that was, if I've got a very vivid picture of the two prisons, what was it like day to day at the camp?

Oh, grim, because it was all winter. It was all winter, it was, you had to go - there was a tap, you had to go and do water run, and the tap, you couldn't really clean things, because it's all cold water, do you know what I mean? So whatever you were cooking, and whatever you're cooking was just rubbish, so from having arriving when there was a kitchen, you go in - this big marquee tent, you know what I mean, with shelves and what have you.

What happened to all that, then?

I think the police, or the bailiffs would have taken it. You know what I mean, it just ended up just being - you could just imagine it's just boggy. I mean, if you go up the road - have you ever been to Greenham?

Yeah.

I haven't been since it's closed. But if you went from the train station, you've got the houses, houses and a little road, a bit of grass. This is - and then the fence right? So that's what you've got. So not much grass at all, you know, middle of the road to here is as much grass as we've got round where we were living. And it's just boggy, it's muddy, it's, you know, you've got whatever pans or cutlery you can get hold of that hasn't been slung that day, or so you know, quite often we'd try and eat - wasn't the KFC, but it was some sort of cafe chain.

Could be the Little Chef?

Little Chef - try and eat in there. (Laughs).

And they wouldn't let you?

(Laughs). You try and smuggle in - even if, you even if you smelled, you'd walk in and they'd go... (sniffs).

Get out!

No, so you were smelly lesbians, which was probably true. And I remember one time, the fashion at the time was, you know, really short hair and flat on top, and I - my hair's dark, so it was dark brown, but I'd bleached the top and painted - coloured it green, and what they used to do was when you set off around the base, they would inform the next soldier along say - you know two women so to make sure between then and there you haven't got in - you know what I mean? So they'd go 'No, no not passed, should have passed. Let's, let's meet up.' And I remember my hair had started growing out, and this young one went 'Yeah two women walking past, one's got a piece of turf on her head.' (Laughs). And it did look - me and Penny always remember that, because it did look like I've just got a square bit of turf and put it on the top. So the day to day was grim, and you know you will get just tired. It was just tiring.

How long were you there for?

Just over a year.

That's a long time to live outside.

And then you can't wait to get home. And then like I say, once you get home, then you think, oh, I don't want to get out my clothes. It's not like my blankets, my duvet. And then getting in the bath and thinking, I've - what can I put on now? And you're just thinking, I don't want to be thinking like that.

Yeah,

You know.

Be nice just to live in your own house, and not have to think like that, rather than have to live outside, and those are the choices. Can I ask you, you don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but did you - I've spoken to some women, who definitely got to Greenham and felt like they could be - they could come out as being as being lesbian. And that

was a huge part of why they felt they wanted to be, and it kind of it sounds like you perhaps knew, and were relationship before you got that there?

Yeah, I came out when I was 16.

Okay, so it wasn't part - because some women I think were attracted to the idea of being able to live with other women, and be themselves and their hometowns hadn't supported that. Was it different for you? Or was there an element of that?

Yeah, this Tray that lives up here, she used to do the weather, the local weather here, and she came to Greenham for that reason, to come out.

Right. But for you, you just felt like it was -

You see meeting Penny, and during the course we were doing, Penny's really political. And among those, you know, 'arise ye starvelings from the slumbers', and you know, what have you, and the red flag and all that sort of thing. And, and during the course, doing the community theatre course where you're out. And also it was it was the time as well - miners' strike, so we were in Blue Gate were linked to the Nottingham women's miners support events, so sometimes we went to Nottingham, um and also there was - they, what was it, I'm trying to think now, 'cause I remember doing - we were doing a tour, part of our theatre, because you had to keep getting in groups - you know, you do musical theatre, you do community theatre, you'd do a devised piece, you'd do you know a written play, so we were doing it was Animal Farm, and it would have been 1982 - went there in 1980 finished in 1983, 1981/'82 - it was that was the riots, the Brixton riots and all that that was happening. Because I remember we'd done a - finished a show of Animal Farm, and we were driving, and we were running out of petrol in the van, so we got to get some petrol, and the - I swear down, Ghost Town was on - it's The Specials (sings) 'This town, ow-ah, is coming like a ghost town.' And that was on on the radio. Got out to go to garage, and every single vehicle in that garage was army.

Gosh.

So there was all that happening at that time as well. So it sort of made it easier to be there and protest, and do something. And like I said I'd finished college, you know, didn't bother - I think I went to one audition and then just knocked drama on the head. And, and that was it, really?

So do you feel your time there sort of changed you, and changed the direction that you then went in?

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, all the women that we met, there, you know, like I said, Kirsty lives in Bradford, but they would come to our house in London, you know what I mean, so absolutely. You know, so I'd go from Bradford to go to women's discos there, or whatever, so, and those connections if I see them, if I go to a funeral of somebody, they're still there, you know, still really, really strong bonds.

Do you feel like there's a some sort of the shared his - the shared experience that it's hard to, it makes it hard to, like hard to communicate that to somebody else, or it makes it sort of slightly separate, or do you feel like it's...

No it was, there was a woman up here she, she organised a Greenham women talking about Greenham women, and an explaining, because a lot of people don't know - a lot women don't know that her-story. You know, and, and but it was full of Greenham women, so it was really lovely. And I think it was two men there. And they did all the talking until the women just said 'You're here to listen and learn, shut the fuck up.' You know?

Good grief!

Yeah, yeah. You know, just talking about it. Well, you feel - 'cause you don't talk about it. You went there. You did it.

Yeah.

You know, and then I don't even remember we sort of petered out - me and Penny. I think it was probably because we started to split. And er, so I think, you know, as a couple. And then we would like I said, I moved to Leeds and Penny moved to Manchester with women from Greenham and I moved in with other women from Greenham that lived in Leeds. You know what I mean?

Yeah.

And then I moved up here. And there's Greenham women up here, and then Penny moved up here to be with somebody. Um. So that brought us back together then really.

That's really nice. And just thinking about - men have come up a couple of times like that, that meeting, and the idea of those police that were horrible at Greenham that really galvanised you into staying, and the young squaddies that didn't really know what to do about you. And the angry Americans who were, you know, very violent. And is that - are there any other experiences of men at the time?

Oh loads.

Men and relationships with the camp, I suppose?

Yeah, it was the police, it was the the constant - it was the constant until the cruise arrived, the police were a constant, and once the cruise were in there. You know, they'd succeeded really, you know, it's there, get on with that type thing. Um, but I remember - I remember - I can't remember! I can't remember exactly where it was, but it might have been Embrace the Base where it got violent as well.

Oh really?

And we were all sitting in front of the the gate, at Blue Gate and police were charging us on horses. So it was that sort o, I mean you sat on the floor. I mean they were moving us, but it was all horses there and all you know so it was all that, you know, eeeeeuuuhh!

How did you - what was the dynamic for how you behaved around that?

You just flopped, you just sat and you sang 'You can't kill the spirit or', you know or Greenham songs I can remember. Rosyth, and er, I hated that 'You can't kill the spirit'.

Because it went on and on and on?

It were awful, weren't it! (Sings in teasing way), and it were always really posh (adopts posh voice) 'You can't kill the sp-i-r-it, she is like a moun-t-ain.' Whereas we from Blue Gate were singing things like, coming back from the pub after a few - what do they call them? Black..., but not snakebites?

Oh snakebite and black, snakebite and black!

That was the only place they'd let you go in was the pub, because of course they're making money. Do you know what I mean?

What would you sing?

We would stagger home!

Singing what?

'Carry Blue Gate Home' - 'plenty pissed and walk alone, carry Blue Gate home'. That's not really the right lyrics. And there was Rosyth (sings to tune of Doe a Deer) 'Rosyth the naval yard. We found it so oppressive. Duh duh duh du, why don't you all get the message? T - ur time is running out. H - our hearts are full of fear. I - hum hum hum hum, that will bring us back to doo doo. And the other one.

So did you prefer to adapt your own songs?

I just didn't - I couldn't bear that 'You can't kill the spirit', and all those ones in that sentiment. So yeah, we wanted a bit more, because we're the northern gate, we wanted a bit more - we liked that one (sings) 'Mr Gorbachev supplies us with our vodka. Mr. Castro makes sure we're capturing dope, I wish he would. All of us are outside agitators who can't see Ronald Reagan brings us hope - he brings us hope. Down at Greenham on a spree, fans by the KGB, laughing singing dancing in the rain. Mostly vegetarian when we're not devouring men, foreigners and other forms of scum.' Something like that! So we preferred that, do you know what I mean, it's a bit more... (sings in posh voice) 'Can't kill the spirit', um so yeah.

It sounds like there was - you felt like there was a definite class divide between Yellow gate and some of the stuff that comes out of that?

When I was interviewed, we always got the shit, we actually got - we got the violence. We got the evictions, we got the, you know, Yellow Gate was all with Skeeter and Helen John and that sort of thing, um...

And do you think that was about, like you say, the Northerners?

It sounds very much... Penny was the only southerner at our gate.

Oh really?

Yeah.

Wow. Did you know of any Northerners who were at the Yellow Gate or..?

Well probably.

But not...

And it were furthest round anyway.

Were there any, were there any gates that you kind of were more friendly with - did you visit each other?

Green Gate, Green Gate was chilled, and I think there was a Purple Gate - was a bit older, but when you 20, you know what I mean, 28 seems pretty old. Doesn't it, really. And so no, I went and saw Jane last year in Nottingham I knew from Greenham, and then but Nottingham women were there and stuff. And one of the women, Lizzie she killed - committed suicide.

Oh.

Because she was real, she was at Blue Gate, from Bradford. She was Kirsty's friend. And she had lots of links with the Nottingham women's miners' strike. And um, she started - she started, she was a lesbian and started seeing a man, and thought that we wouldn't, we wouldn't like her any more 'cause she was straight, so she threw herself under a train in London. So that was another really horrific.

That's terrible.

Lizzie Spring, she was called.

Lizzie Spring. That's really sad.

Um. And yeah, did you watch the film Pride?

Yeah, I've seen Pride. Yeah.

'Cause we were on that march.

Oh, really.

That march when the miners were on it.

We've interviewed some women who have - were part big part of Greenham, who also were a big part of the miners' strike and talked a lot about. And it's a really important link.

Yeah, yeah.

Did you feel like the media had any - we've talked we, before we started recording you touched a bit on the - we sort of talked about how The Guardian pitched things, but did you - how did the media in general portray, do you feel?

I think they betrayed us.

Betrayed?

Yeah, I think, I think they did you know, and that's why - because they didn't, you know we were dirty scummy women who, you know, mostly, you know, mostly lesbian, so it was all that sort of scumminess.

So did they play that up in how they portrayed you, do you think?

Yeah, yeah. And that's why I think probably the Helen Johns that wanted to get into (adopts high pitched voice) 'We're not all like that, du du du' - you know, I think that's a bit of it, because they had caravans I seem to remember - they had a bit of a luxury life camping there, you know what I mean. So yeah, so that's, I think, and then they stopped it, even though we were there. And even though our protests got louder, and louder and we were in more and more and more, the reportage got less and less and less. So I think that was very much to do with, you know, this is - if you carry on doing - I think they probably got told to quit out - stop it. Because they did this whole big spiel that Greenham's gone. They filmed the - Yellow Gate was getting evicted. So they did 'Greenham has gone', and that's why we did that huge big, pulling the

thing down to say we haven't - you know, to get all the press back again. So that was that that was the intention, to say 'We've gone nowhere.'

Yeah.

Um, so that was that was why. But in fairness, I mean, we were dirty, filthy lesbians, know what I mean! They're not going to provide Portaloos for us, and washbasins, so we were in fairness, you know, only picture that's going to be seen of us is, is around a fire with, you know, knacky clothes on. So it's not going to be seen as some middle class, um, I don't remember feeling they were supportive. But I felt very proud when me picture was in. But I haven't got it.

Yeah. How about the - you were talking about the locals, and how - so the pub was supportive, Little Chef not so much. Were there - how were the people of Newbury with you?

Well, you didn't really go into Newbury, you only really went into Newbury - because it's a canny walk to get down there, canny walk to get back, and you were a bit scared about leaving camp really, in case something happened while you were - you know, so you didn't really go to Newbury. I can't really remember.

Did anyone visit you? Because - and I remember, I just know that things like I know my parents would bring food and firewood sometimes.

They did by the early '80s, but that that stopped because yeah, by '83, by the evictions that were going on, so the food thing must have been taken down - the tent, you know the marquee, tent thing. And hostile you know, the cars that were driving past 'Fucking lesbians, fucking...' because you were making - they didn't know that there was cruise missiles in - or their house was looking out over what was their common land that's now cruise missiles aimed at Russia - they didn't mind that. What they minded was look down and there's dirty, hairy lesbians - that's what they, you know get rid of lesbians - that was that where their - I know, I know it's bizarre. But then they were probably all Margaret

Thatcher voters anyway, well they are in Newbury, aren't they? And so, so it was and like I said, you know, maggots and all sorts of - I can't remember other things they did, but they did do lots of other things, you know?

No wonder it bonded you so much then. If it's sort of you against the world after a while, I should imagine.

Well, I mean, you know when you started going there for a while, and it was just this teepee, and I remember Penny and I, she said 'Are you doing what I'm doing?' Working out how to make a teepee, because she's really good on the sewing machine. And what we'd do is when we'd go home, there's a time when there were these trousers that were really in fashion, they were baggy and the crutch was down at the bottom. Do you remember them?

Yeah.

Like right down there (laughs). So we'd go make them, so we'd go home and buy funfair.

So like hareem pants?

Yeah, we were just, and then we'd just make them on the weekend we're signed on and then just bring half a dozen, and 'Can I have?' - so that's what we used to do.

Why, why those pants particularly? Were they easier to make or..?

Yeah, probably, and they fit all because it was just elasticated, so there was just one bog standard size, then different funfair.

Amazing. If you - if you, because I know you're from a very arts background, if you - if someone was to make art out of Greenham now, what kind of form would you want that to take? How would you want it to be depicted or what kind of art form would it be in?

Oh, just pictures of women - just fires, or sat in front of gates, or holding hands.

What are those - are those the things that most stand out to you in your own memories? What's the sort of defining features of someone said to you tell me the things that most make you think of Greenham, what would they be?

Fire, women, mud, dirt, um, every time I hear um, what's his name - Bob, Bob Marley, Three Little Birds, I think of Greenham.

Why that one particularly?

Because me and Penny were doing night watch, Christmas Eve - the morning of Christmas Eve, because then we were hitching to Bradford, got a lift by a copper who took us, who took as far out as you can to a point on a motorway junction, where a week before a woman had been raped and murdered.

So he took you there deliberately did he - to frighten you?

Left us. But anyway, that morning we - it was two little robins outside one of the tents we were opposite. And that music came on, and we just looked and went 'awww'. So every time I hear it - Three Little Birds, I think of that, and I think of staying up all night. And then my mother then - we hitched up to Bradford, and me mother went 'Have you come in front door looking like that?'

(Laughs). 'Have you come in the front door looking like that?'

She was really ashamed. I mean, she didn't know. Never knew that I'd been to prison.

Oh really?

No, no, she's a Thatcher supporter. I told - yeah, so my sister came down to support me one time, Embrace the Base. And that was the time when we're all sat in front of the gate. And that was when the horses were there, and she was terrified. You know? Absolutely, because she'd never seen anything - she'd never seen anything like that. Whereas it was a, you know, regular for us. And somebody came to me head, I can't remember what it was. But yeah, it's, it's the bond I have, with with and, you know, I can't hardly remember anybody at college. But I can remember all those who've been in the camp and still, you know, somehow those webs we weave that come back to us, again.

Is that - we were thinking about how important it is for other women, younger women to know about Greenham. What was - is that, do you think that's important?

Oh, absolutely, because I think, I think things like miners' strike, or even after that, there was a clause 28. And that had politicised a lot of women by that point, you know what I mean, and again, it probably made it easier, because that's by the time clause 28 came into play, I was working in schools, I was an interpreter. Um. So I was working sign language interpreter. So I was working in schools and our head of service, because we were asked to interpret, we said - well, we volunteered, we wanted to interpret en route, and the speeches, and our head of service went absolutely off it - that we were seeing publicly. You know, so then parents would come in and you know, and went 'Tough. This is what I do my private time. You know, I don't advocate it in school, don't promote it all in school, because I'm here to interpret. But you're not silencing me.' And it did, we went to - we had marches, because that's when I was trying to find that picture or anything I've got of Greenham. And I've got loads and loads - not loads, but you know, paper cuttings from clause 28 from Leeds marches and Manchester, everyone went to Manchester. It was a humongous march in Manchester. And me other sister who lives in Manchester came to, came on the march with me. So there was that sort of, I think it politicised a lot of people.

What do you feel is politicising people now - what would you campaign about now?

(Laughs) Oh, well, what's politicising? Well obviously, it's this debacle about Brexit, isn't it? Which is not based on pure racism, you know, for me my opinion, you know - get them out. (Sighs). Don't know if anything is really politicising. But I think, yeah, I mean, because I don't work in education now. I work as an interpreter freelance. So I do a lot of theatre and hospitals, doctors, courts, police, that sort of thing - counselling. But the young people I've met, or I meet, and I think that's a product of their parents, because, like minded tend to be like minded don't you? So mixing with like Jamie who is a Teacher of the Deaf, her young people, her children are very political very, you know, Guardian read. So, but I don't really meet with young people to know any others, but the people I have met - I can't remember where it was in Bradford a couple of years ago, um I went down, I went into Shipley to get something for me mam, and, and there was a march, and it was young people mainly on the march and it was about their Conservative MP. But the young people - the speeches that they were giving on this march were really spot on. Were really empowering. Were really, you know, so I thought it is happening with young people, you know, but because I don't really engage with - well do engage, I'm a member of the Labour Party but I don't engage in any of the meetings, like Penny's at their meetings all the time and what have you, but apparently there's a EDF meet - march in town today. Only about 30 people on it, you know, no one heard about it so I don't really know - because up in the Northeast, especially this area, there's nothing for young people. Um, so this area had trouble with a gang of youths that were just (sighs) scratching cars and doing you know, getting into trouble, but not massively into trouble. So people were going 'I want cameras, I want cameras', so what I did was I organised, leafleted and got the church hall and had a meeting with the police and the community. And then the community felt safer because it's Ali from next door, and it's Ayesha from up the road so, and, and the troubles stopped - it might start back again because kids that are probably you know it's cold, and I'm not going around in the cold, you know, so it might start back again when it

gets Spring - warmer, and they might - but there was one specific young person that was known to the police and selling drugs. So that's a lot of what - and there's barbers on the corner here, and they went and stood near it, you know, you'd get high - you can smell the stuff. So poverty in this area, and the fact that you know, the bowling alley's closed down, the swimming pool's closed down, the youth workers's all been cut. You know, and it's the same, interpreters - BSL interpreters are on strike with with the doctors up here. But getting interpreters getting on strike. Actually, what we find out is they're going yeah, we're in support of a boycott - they're still working. And it's because government are a little bit like Karelian - have allowed massive companies to take over.

It's a mess, isn't it?

It's a mess. This country is a mess. Yeah, but anyway, you brought politics in!

I did, it's good. I'm just thinking about, I'm sort of thinking back over, is there anything I want to pick up that you said? In-fact, is there anything that you would like - that you think I should have asked that I haven't, or that you're interested in?

You have a look.

Well, I feel like we've kind of covered a lot of a lot of this to be honest. Everything I had prepared has kind of come up. Yeah, it definitely has - I've only got one last question I probably would ask, and but, is there anything that you would like to talk about that we haven't?

I didn't anticipate anything, 'cause the list that you'd sent before, and I thought well, that's not 600 words, that's a book, if you start but one finger - e, e, e, but I didn't mean to upset anybody I didn't it was just...

No, no.

You know. And we could have, there's so many more women in this - just area alone, could have said Trina around the corner. But there's so many women that went weren't there?

Yeah, all these posts have been quite self selecting as well. So we've tried to engage the people that have come forward to us. And I think if we do more of this, we'd hope to use as networks to sort of extend that out to say who do you know, do you think we should be talking to?

I know there's archives in Leeds in the Brotherton part of the library, and I went, oh, it's kept in the Brotherton part! That's me name!

Oh is it, yeah of-course it is.

So I know there's archives there. But I know - I've tried to Google - Penny said um, that drum thing.

That drum thing?

Hang on, I can't read her writing at the best of times. Yeah, when she said she photo of me and her playing number on the...

Water, water, like tomtoms, yeah.

Yeah. That was Easter 1984. That when I was breaking into base - breaking in the base was Easter, you'll have to write it down...

No, not at all.

Easter 1984, and that was the mass action. And then December 1983. Embrace the Base. She thinks it might have been in the Newbury Times, of us playing the tom toms. But I know you're reluctant to do that.

No, no what I was, I was just thinking it gave me an idea actually of one thing I do want to ask you, before I ask my last question, which is,

Um, we talked a little bit about NVDA. And you were talked about flopping. And so I know that as - is it nonviolent direct action. So I was wanting to hear what your thoughts about that as a practice. How did you do - yeah, what do you think of when I say those things?

Painful, painful because it's gravel. So you're being dragged on the gravel until your trousers start to come down or it just goes through your trousers. And then you know, you can't really say 'I'll get in the van meself', do you know what I mean? They're going to throw - any part of your body is hitting metal. You know, they're not.

So why did you all use it? Why was it...

Because, because that was the whole thing is it's, we're not violent and that it's you that's been violent. And so it would have led to temptation to actually - enough, you know shoulder, you know, elbow, whatever, and then then it starts being violent, and then you've given them the key. And then you've just destroyed everything that women have done. So it was painful, and I get why you did it. The one thing I never got is why we just didn't carry on pulling the wire down on the base, rather than going in.

Because that was more painful even?

Yeah, yeah. And had the whole base down, know what I mean, so they're just surrounded by chicken wire or razor wire.

Yeah.

Would have been more poignant with these empty posts.

Did you um, did you find it - were there times that tested your commitment to nonviolent direct action? Were there times it's hard not to be violent?

No, because we weren't violent. You just did it. It was just, they just dragged you and threw you, dragged you and threw you. If you get back and sit back there again, you could. They just threw you into the gutter or wherever, you know what I mean, so...

And you would come back and sit down again?

Yeah, if you can. But I mean, I'm talking about times when there were the cruise - there ere thousands of police, you know, they knew there was going to be something, so you know, and horses and the cruise missile arriving, that sort of thing. And police just coming around putting buckets of water on you fire and then walking off to the next one. So you've got you've got start again, if you've got wood.

Did you get - talk between you about who was going to do what action, or how far you wanted to go?

No, somebody would just say like 'I'm going in tonight, does anybody want to come?'

Oh, really?

Yeah, or 'Let's - what can we do?' or you know, like 'Let's paint - let's all meet in the pub in London because we're all in court the next day, and let's paint Nuke-bury all the way up'. So it was just, you know - there was the teddy bears picnic had gone in, like I said Chris had gone screaming Sergeant Bilko - it was constant, it was just a constant, you know, do what you can, constantly.

Did you ever have any friendships with any of the guys that worked there, or was that impossible?

No, no. I mean you know, um, you wouldn't be horrible to the little soldier that's at the gate. You know what I mean, because you'd be just this is - he'd have huge big drum with a massive fire. 'You're warm, why can't keep me warm?' 'Please, I'm gonna have to ring.' 'Do that. Put

some wood on the fire - you've got a picket fence.' That sort of thing. So it was do as much and as often, and then go in, I think the probably the only time really we went into Newbury was to support the women in court. You know, so if you know Trina or whoever is in court, you'd go and support them, you know, do what you can, and you know, sometimes it could be really upsetting seeing them being, you know, dragged off, you know, because they're not going to, they're going to walk, so the police are going to drag them to know that they're going to prison. And so that was upsetting, would be upsetting. You know.

So that, so that thing about using the flop for nonviolent direct action, you'd do that in the courtroom as well, would you? Oh, wow. (Exhales). So, could you explain why you think it's and I've sort of asked you this already, but I'll just rephrase it from last time - could you explain why you think it's important that Greenham is remembered by subsequent generations?

Because it's, it's about, it's about women. And I think we say history, history all the time, but this is about her-story.

Great. That's lovely. Is there anything else you'd like to add, Christine? Anything that you've heard?

You must have heard the same stories over and over again?

No, they're, they're different every time. But some things overlap.

I remember - that's it.

But from different angles, completely.

Penny and I were when we're in the prison, not in prison in a police cell. And she had, she was really ill with dysentery.

Penny was?

Yeah.

Oh, that's awful.

I remember that. I remember, I remember as well over that period I'd been chosen to do court jury...

Like jury service?

Jury service. And what they do is the close the little courts, like Newbury would be closed in the summer, and it would go to London. And we were living in London, and I used to spend my whole time papping myself that a police officer wouldn't suddenly rock up from - you know what I mean, that I would recognise, or a judge would recognise, so I was completely...

So find out who you really were, was that why you were frightened?

Yeah. Recognise me, and then my name would come out as to who I was. Because I went down as - the first time I went down as Ann Karen Chief - 'ankerchief', so when the judge went 'Miss Chief', so it was Frida Bloggs and Miss Chief. And so I'd say that by the second day or the third day - it was really pathetic case. Anyway, somebody that clearly had mental health problems and had gone into a bank and tried to steal, um, I don't know what it was, but it was -and then sat in the bank and rung the police and said 'You know', it was somebody that just wanted to be safe. You know - help. So and so I remember just saying to them that I'd got dysentery, so I was excused.

And you knew all the symptoms because you'd seen Penny with it?

You don't want to be around someone who's got dysentery, do you?

No. That's very clever of you.

I just couldn't. That's the only time I've been asked to do court - was that one time, ironically.

That is ironic, isn't it?

Yeah.

(Christine). Why did you leave?

Oh, yes. Good question.

Greenham? I think Penny and I were splitting, and she thought - there was a woman that was clearly interested in me, and it made Penny feel even more uncomfortable, because we were splitting, you know, so it was one of those really horrible, nasty splits. When you finish - you know what I mean, because you don't want - it's your everything. It's your friendship and your her-story and everything together. And so, and I think we all sort of started to dissolve at that point, you know. But I can't, I can't quite, I think it was that. And it was just getting more miserable. And what was the point now, because...

(Christine). Do you know what year that was?

'84. Yeah, yeah. But I can't remember it being definitive or whatever. And then just sort of like having to think about moving on with your life. And so then started to train to be a BSL interpreter.