

Lorna Richardson

Thank you very much for talking to me today, Lorna, this is great. So I suppose my first question is, you just you mentioned that you were really young when you went to Greenham, what what, what took you there? How come you went in the first place?

I had an aunt, who was very political, she was an MP. But she was from a she, she was a feminist I, I, I grew up in what is now known as a chaotic household.

Right.

And this aunt was the steady point in my life. Everything I am, every any good thing I have ever done is because I had her in my life as a child. The first political march I ever went on was a pro choice march, because she was part of that whole 70s. I mean, she was a leading light in the 70s pro-choice movement. And one of the, I mean, I, you know, she used to take, I'm the youngest of four, she used to take me and we all four of us, look back on her as this sort of sanctuary this sort of, and it wasn't I mean, my mum was lovely, but chaotic household, my dad was an arse, chaotic household, whatever. And all of which sounds like a side thing. But actually the whole thing. It's not an accident, the path my life took, when you're talking about control, and violence, and all kinds of things. So anyway, my aunt took each of us, for weekends at these. And she used to take me and my middle sister together, because we, me and my little sister went round as a pair. And when I was 11, she took us to see The China Syndrome, which is a film with a very young Michael Douglas, who actually appears in this story later, and Jane Fonda and Jack Lemmon and it's actually nothing to do with nuclear weapons, it's to do with nuclear power. It's it's a sort of fictionalized account of Three Mile Island. And on the way home, she told us all about Three Mile Island and fa la la la. And it was this. I mean, she took us to movies all the time that was, and she didn't have children of her own. So she took us to sort of, you know, movies, that you wouldn't necessarily think to take a child to. Which was great, absolutely great. And she was, she had been very active in the anti nuclear movement. She'd been on the early Aldermaston marches and all the rest of it. And she was, so I got all that stuff from her. And I mean, oh, she taught me so many things. And she actually the other thing she taught me is that you don't have to make excuses for violence. And that you can. This, I did not expect to be talking about this. But actually, I think it's important. She loved my dad, my dad was her brother. She never once made excuses for him. She never once made excuses for him. Even though she loved him. She was always on our side, even though she loved him. She was always outspoken in her political life. And she had a very active public political life as well as the private life. And she was a model to me of political and personal integrity. And I think, and I haven't, it's really weird these this kind of thing. I, I think I thought about it often in my life. I'm not sure I've ever connected it in that way that I had not expected to be talking about my aunt when I sat down with you. But anyway, so she's so she's

She sounds great.

She was she was just this. In fact, somebody has written a book about her, so I'll send you the link.

Yes please. We'll put it on the website.

Um, and so she, she was this sort of figure in my life and I'd learned about stuff from her. And then I had a couple of friends at school they were in the year above me and me and my friend, who were in the same year. We were involved in sort of the local CND I mean, I, you know, sort of like from 14/15 and, you know, we started up a debating club at school and it was just a secondary modern in Kingston, actually it was in New Malden. But, and one of these two other women. It was me, Wendy, Kerry and Anita, and I'm still in touch with Anita though I've lost touch with Wendy and Kerry and Kerry and Anita had been to Greenham. And we done I mean, it was the 80s we were teenagers. We'd done like dorky street theatre about nuclear weapons. I mean, I look back and I think, Oh dear. But it was you know, props we were we were giving it a go. And, oh blimey, and, like, in fact, my first experience of quakerism was Kingston Quaker meeting house, which has since been knocked down and replaced with the Primark. And they've got an in environmentally fantastic building elsewhere in Kingston, which they rebuilt. And they used to have a little yard outside and they'd have a Saturday store every Saturday with Kingston Peace Council leaflets and all the rest of it. And I got I learnt about Greenham that way.

Ah!

And Kerry and Anita, I think had been once and it hadn't been going very long. And then because it started in 81. And then there was this action in 82. So it was September 81. And then there was this action, and it was sort of spring, spring, what was it called can't remember what it was called, like, who knows? And we were like, let's go up and I was 16. And the four of us or, was it the four of us? I can't even, no, it was the three of us, I think Kerry was already there, hitched up. So it was my first experience of hitching. And we got to Greenham. And it was a massive, massive gathering at green gate. And it was, it was it was a lot of sort of wandering around. And it was, I don't have very clear memories of it. And apart from we, again, this sounds like a digression, but it's not is that one of the other things that had been happening in my life at that time was I had, I was working up to a final eating disorder. And then I read Jemaine Greer, Female Eunuch, and then I went to Greenham. And I thought, Fuck this. And I keep, again, hadn't expected to mention that in that conversation with you. But whenever I think of this swerve that I took, and it doesn't mean I don't, I haven't had lifelong issues with food, as practically every woman you stop in the street will tell you. But whenever I think I coz I always think I mean, you know, whenever I think of you know, reading The Female Eunuch saved me from a particular sort of path going down, I have this very particular memory, of standing in line for a food cart at green gate. At Greenham, that first visit, thinking, actually, it's alright for me to have lunch, you know? And it was, it sounds. I don't know if all the, I'm sure. I wonder if half your interviews are like this, where you suddenly think, hang on! There are connections to be made here! And so anyway, so that that was a thing. And so that was in, I don't know, March or something. I think. I can't remember the date. And then there was a blockade of the base that same year, and we went down. And again, it was me and when we went for the day, I don't think she stayed over. I can't remember. It's not very long time ago

now. But I did stay overnight. So there was a demonstration one day and then a blockade the next. And we slept over at a gate called turquoise, which is

What was that like?

Well turquoise was very quiet. It's very, it very rarely had a camp at it at all.

Ok.

If I presume you've been to the location?

Yes. Just quite recently, actually.

Right. And it's quite interesting. Having known the base so well. Now, I can walk the perimeter as it used to be. But it's not always clear if you're, if you didn't know it before, for things and to be honest, even if you did, like there was blue gate. And then if you go right into the woods, there's a there was another set of date gates, which they never used. I'll come on to that later. Turquoise gate. And then if you went a bit further into the woods, there was a sort of bit where the fence went into a point pointing in towards the base, and Emerald gate, which wasn't a gate at all was there because it was right opposite the silos. And so turquoise was sort of halfway between blue and Emerald. And I didn't take part in the blockade, and then I came home and then so I was 16 then, I hit 17. I had the my first visit to Greenham I was still living at home. As soon as I hit 16 I'd left home.

Right.

And I was a lodger, in a, in a the house of somebody I used to babysit for which was great. And I'd gone to sixth form college and I was doing my A-Levels. And it was the obvious thing in the world to think, fuck this, I'm going to live at Greenham, so I did. And I, I sort of started spending more and more time there. And I thought, actually, no, well at no, the thing that triggered it, the thing that sort of triggered me, I came to a crunch point, I'd been arrested a bunch of times. And I was 17. And, and it was time for my A-Level exams, and I wasn't sure if I was gonna go to prison. And the thing is, I didn't have very much money, as you might imagine. And if I put in for my exams, and I didn't show up to them, I would be charged for them. So, and as it turned out, I didn't go to prison on that occasion. But I thought, let's, let's just wrap this up. So I finished my course, I finished my other course, I withdrew from the exams, so I wouldn't be liable for the money. And I just packed myself up and went to Greenham full time.

Were you at a particular gate?

Well that I started off, I mean, the my very first visit, I was at Green gate, but that it was it was a gathering there. There was a massive clearing there. And I started off at yellow gate for quite a while. And the funny thing is at Greenham, I mean this is how I got, because I mean, I mean, this was fairly early on. But it had had enough. I mean, there's a certain amount. I mean, there was fellowship, but there wasn't, which I wouldn't. It's not what I would have used at the time. But there's also an amount of just sort of getting on with it. And and some people were really friendly, some people didn't speak at all. I mean, one of the reasons I got to know Rebecca is because, you know, she invited me on an action. And it was like, fine, whatever which was, that was another thing. That was good. And then as I got to know, other women, we set up a gate at Emerald gate, so we could watch the silos.

Ah ok.

And that was with Jane and a woman who was a huge influence on both me and Jane, who died a couple years ago called Hazel. And I mean, Hazel was in her 80s when she died. She's she's a big chunk older than me and Jane. And there's another woman called Penny. And so, was that was that an emerald? Yeah, that was an emerald. And there was another woman called Hero who's since died. And then I spent time when we shut down Emerald, I spent time at Blue gate, because I'd always had, you know, a soft spot the size of the Albert Hall for blue gate, because blue gate got the worst of it. Blue gate. Were nearest Newbury. So when the evictions happened, and I'm sure you've heard all about the evictions, the council trucks that come up from Newbury, up Bury's Bank Road, they would have evict blue gate who had no notice. And somebody from Blue gate would jump into a vehicle and do the rounds warning, everybody. So everybody got a five minute start. And then the council trucks would evict blue gate again before they went home. And blue gate tended to be younger and working class. And not the people that you know, journalists would come and an interview, and all the rest of it and and I thought well, it's time for me to stop admiring blue gate from afar I'll actually pitch in and I had a lovely, lovely time at blue gate, and it was fantastic. And then I think me and some blue gaters possibly. And some red gaters and we we had we were what was it violet? Oh actually me, Jane and Hazel. There was one point when we set up a gate between Emerald gate, no, we've done between green gate and yellow gate called Jade gate. And that this was in the era when the convoy was coming out because it was it wasn't a gate at all. It was in the woods. But it was directly opposite the vehicle compound.

Oh brilliant.

So you could see everything. And so I have done the rounds somewhat.

Yeah! How long did you live actually live there for then?

It's a bit how long is a piece of string because I would say that the answer I'll give you applies to when I did not have anywhere else.

Right.

I tend I visited for a while, before I gave up any other location. After I left, I did not go back for a while. I didn't go back to visit. And I think I needed a sort of a space and all that. But but also, I mean, the reason I left is because the INF Treaty had happened. And I felt that my particular job there,

Right.

had finished. So I didn't feel the impulse to go back I mean. And we carried on at Aldermaston. I so the answer I usually give is four years.

It's a good long time. But you visited before and it sounds like you might have visited after.

But. Yeah, I mean, I was how old, I'm terrible with dates, absolutely terrible. But I think I was on because I I'd been arrested before I moved there full time, because that was one of the impetuses and it was quite though, I get them all muddled up. And the way it worked is it was quite a long time before you necessarily go to court. They didn't, they didn't really speed it up much. And there was a period of about seven years when I was on bail for something or other more or less continuously, sort of overlapping.

Wow!

And that included, um

What were they for? What sort of things were you doing?

Well, funnily enough, because I've just I'm about to get my DBS certificate. So I'm 53 and it's chasing me years after. So you know, like I've told my line manager and I've told my premises committee and I've told the do, you know that, I can't remember what's on it, quite frankly, because you're not in a position to keep records?

No.

But I would say most of them are criminal damage.

What would you have done to have accrued the charges that what you mentioned actions and things? What were they what sort of get up to?

Well, I think the first one is actually trespass on a railway. Only it wasn't trespass on a railway. I chained myself to a helicopter on Waterloo station. And it was I can't. This is thing of not having records. It was approached, there was a whole I mean it remember, this isn't very long after the Falklands. And we'd gone from this huge period of and it seems weird now because in a way we've been involved in wars all the way through. But for example, there's people in the military who had their entire military careers in the military who never saw action. That's not true now. But there was a big chunk of time between the end of during the Cold War, but between the end of actual wars if you discount Korea and all the rest of it, which obviously you shouldn't, but there are there are, there was a certain period of time where where we weren't involved in hot wars, generally speaking, specific people were involved in specific things or peacekeeping operations or whatever. But but this wasn't very long after sort of geologically speaking as it were, it wasn't very long after the Falklands, and they were doing this sort of big recruitment thing. And I don't know, I can't remember why anyway, so there's that. I mean, it wasn't it was very minor thing. But most of them the big one, the one that caused me to give up my levels was a action designed to, it was called a visibility action, because it was like, I'm pretty sure. The difficulty is, is that I was there for a long time, and you do a lot of things. And it's a bit like sort of mix and match, you might put one court case with one action, and they're not necessarily the same thing. But anyway, I think this is one where basically a bunch of us just kept cutting into the we did a big public entry into the base, as a way of saying, We are still here. This is still a live issue. You know, the peace camp has been here for a number of years. And we know you're not really interested in it anymore. But let us tell you now that we are not stopping. And again, I'm terrible on the details because it's a long time ago, I think there were 12 of us got nicked, and unusually because normally you'd just been put through the magistrate's court which is a slap on the wrist and you know you can choose a fine or you get bound over to keep the peace or whatever and you can choose not to pay the fine and you go to prison la la la la. Unusually for this one because of the if I remember right, the sum of money that we were alleged to have caused damage to, to a limit of it gave us the choice to go to Crown Court and so we thought, rock on. And normally in the normal course of affairs, you would not wish to go to Crown Court because the penalties are much longer and it takes a lot, you know, and it was a first court Crown Court thing we had at Greenham.

And is it? Did you want to because it was more high profile?

Well, actually, well it was a mixture of that. But also, you didn't get three newbie magistrates trying you, you got 12 people, actual people who weren't there to uphold a certain view of what the way the world should be view is literally a jury of your peers.

Oh interesting.

And and, oh, dear Lord, it took a long time. And the first. So we were a mixture of I mean, we were a real mixed bunch. And not all of us knew each other at the beginning. We certainly knew each other by the end. And it was it held in Newbury, and the first trial we had was a mistrial. And I think, was that Judge Mirchi? Anyway, and so some of us were represented by lawyers, there's these three wonderful lawyers, Izzy, Dora, and Elizabeth. Or Liv. And yeah, all wonderful. And, and some of us represented ourselves, because you can get away with more, quite frankly, if you represent yourself. And I think I was the youngest there. And the first was a mistrial, because somebody had submitted and none of our argument wasn't that we hadn't done it, because we very clearly had, and we meant to do it. And were there was photos of us, that was not the issue. The issue was, why we'd done it. And like so for example, I I mean, you know, the example that Rebecca always uses, which I don't, I don't know, if anybody, I don't think any of us used it this sort of same sort of thing is, you know, if a house is burning down and you kick through the door, it would be unjust, to rescue for criminal damage to the door. Because you're saving people's lives by kicking down the door and getting the sleeping family out. Which I think is a very neat and, and fast way of explaining it. And it's not a you know, I mean, I've had the same sort of discussions about Extinction Rebellion. Is it a pain in the arse not being able to get home? Yes, it's going to be more of a pain in the arse when society breaks down. And we're all scrambling in rubbish heaps for you know, banana skins. So better the disruption now than than disruption later?

Yeah.

And somebody submitted a copy of Greenham Women Are Everywhere, which is one of the publications that somebody had made. And because it had a photo of something in it, and it appeared from the evidence pile sort of completely wrapped in gaffa tape. So that the jury when this evidence was submitted, couldn't read any of the things so they could only see the photo. And another one of the lawyers said, when you are in the jury room, rip off the tape and read its publication. And for some reason, that was counted as sort of improper, I don't know. Anyway,

And that went towards a mistrial?

I think that was it. I couldn't swear to it. But I'm pretty sure that was one of the things that he said anyway. So we had to start all over again. And we were I mean, we were a week in by that point. I mean, it wasn't a quick thing. And so we had to wait another few months, we had another trial. And, and I was I mean, bearing in mind, I was I think I was, hadn't I hit 18 by then? Again, I'm terrible at dates. I'm terrible at periods of time. I was certainly 17 when we started, I was probably almost certainly 18 by the time we finished. And so I was one of the I think I was the youngest. And and, you know, we were all sort of like bracing ourselves because this crown court trial, we didn't know was happening we were fairly sure we're gonna go to jail. And it was this bizarre situation when the jury gave their verdicts. I don't think there's a word for it. If you call a scapegoat, the one person who is punished instead of a group. I don't know if there is a word for

the one person who is released as an indication. And of the 12 of us 11 were found guilty. And I was found not guilty. And I think it's because and I think it was they wanted to let one of us go. And, you know, I was there on the stand. saying, Yes, I cut the fence. Yes I did this. This is what I bloody. There was no, there was no question at all, that I had committed damage. The only question was whether it was criminal. However, I was the youngest in the group or nearly the youngest. And I certainly looked the youngest. And I think it was the jury's way. And you know, the ways of juries are mysterious and I've been a juror bizarrely enough since. So you never know. But it seemed to be a very clear way of them indicating sympathy or something.

Yeah.

I don't they couldn't let us all go. Or at least then they couldn't let us all go I mean subsequent trials have done different things. Um

And did the people that were convicted go to prison?

I think some did, no they didn't get they didn't get custodials. There's been very few outright custodials. I mean, one of, there might have, you know, I can't remember I really can't remember. I mean, a lot of us went to prison for refusing to pay fines.

Did you? Did you serve prison time as well?

Yes.

How was that?

Um,

And where was that?

It was. I've had. This is a little bit unusual in that I've actually had three crown court trials.

Oh okay, so you've had three Crown Court trials?

Yeah. And like the second that was quite a long time after the first. And there were two of us. And we had separate trials. I don't know how they got separated, because it's obviously nicer to have them done together. And, Anne went first. And she got a year. Which, obviously,

That's a long time.

Hideous for her. She was lovely. I mean, she's always described as a vicar's wife, which I think sort of, you know, it's like actually, she's a hell of a lot more than that. He should be described as a yes, yes,

A Greenham Woman's husband.

But absolutely. And

That's a long time why did she get such a long time?

Because it was Crown Court. And I was just thinking, oh shit, shit! I didn't get a custodial then. I can't remember why. I cannot remember what happened there. Honestly, this is awful. I'm a terrible interviewee I'm so sorry.

No no, not at all. What's what was it like when you did go to prison? Did you go to Holloway, or?

I went a bunch of times. And some of it was on remand. remand then was a lot easier than regular. You used to be able to get, like I don't smoke, and I'm not really a drinker. But as a personal remand then, you could get fags sent in everyday and you can get a can of beer sent in everyday.

Really!

Isn't that bizarre? So of course, it makes you you know, it's it. You just I remember one of the screws saying to me, I haven't seen you smoke, and it's like, well, I'm an occasional smoker. All my friends I'm just passing on to all the other woman in the bill in the wing. It was horrible. But it was, I mean, I was only ever in for very short times. My it was like you know, a week here, a fortnight there. I think maybe three weeks, couple of days here a couple of days there. The longest I ever did was my third Crown Court trial. And I got four months.

Gosh.

Of which I did two.

Right.

And after that, I thought, actually since then, I have not broken the law.

Really? That was long enough?

I just thought I'm done now.

Yeah. Do you talk to, how did you find other prisoners were with you when you were in there? Did it?

Mostly lovely. No, the thing is there's a really actually. There's there's a documentary about Holloway that they made before it shut which would be really worth you watching. What I didn't understand at the time, because I thought we were just a sort of drop in the pool. Because I mean, the female prison population is really small now comparatively to men.

Yes.

And it was small then. I mean, it's still way too many women in prison. And I just thought we were a sort of tiny handful of randoms sort of sweeping through. I think we were a bigger chunk of the prison population than I realized at the time. And um mostly, I mean, there was one or two exceptions. I met a lot of lovely women. I did think I'm the only person in the world who really ever pays for anything but you know.

Did any of them come out to Greenham afterwards or anything?

No, not that I know of.

Ok.

That was I mean, a lot. I mean, I was very young at the time. A lot of them were very young. I mean, I remember being, you know, in a sharing a four um room with a girl who was 15.

Gosh.

And you know, who couldn't read or write and you just think, Oh, God. Um, it, going to prison, while I never wish to do it again. And I can't actually tell you how many times I did it, because again, they all blur into one. And I mean, you know, do you count four four days in a police cell as going to prison?

Definitely.

Oh alright then. Do you know what I mean? It's like, it's, it's a bit. And the difference with this, the last one was, it was my first custodial, I've been in prison a lot. But this was the first time I have not been at at, because it you know, a door is shut. And you can leave the door shut as long as you know, you can open it again. And if if you if you're in well, actually, that's not true with remand, you're stuck in remand until but you know, it's not gonna be forever.

Yeah.

But if you if you're in, because actually, in that way, remand is more difficult than being in because you're not paying a fine. But if you're in because you haven't paid a fine, you can ask somebody to pay a fine, and you can get out again,

Yeah.

And you know, if you're in, if you're on a custodial.

You just have to see it out don't you.

You have to see it out. So I was mostly in Holloway. Um, I went to East Sutton Park, which is a sort of open prison, which was a total waste of time because it was, I think Douglas Hurd was Home Secretary. And there was this whole scandal about people being in prison in in police cells over Christmas. Oh, we can't have people in police cells over Christmas. So in it, this was presented as a sort of humanitarian thing of getting people out of police cells. What in practice it meant is that they just shuffled people around prisons rapidly. So who knows where the hell you ended up, so I was transferred out of Holloway into East Sutton Park. And of course, all my mail was sent to

Holloway, so they'd send it on to Sutton Park. And then because of this shuffling around, I was sent from East Sutton Park back to Holloway, after a week in East Sutton Park and all my mail stayed at East Sutton Park and so it's been people writing to me at Holloway it's been sent to East Sutton Park. So there was weeks when I didn't, I had a ton of mail, but was given to me when I left. But there was a whole chunk of time in there that I didn't get any, and mail is huge.

Yeah.

I mean, you know, a tube a tube of toothpaste is huge in prison. I'm not necessarily stick your mail on the wall with it, but um,

You stick your mail on the wall with toothpaste?

It works.

Brilliant.

It's, um, but small things mean a lot.

Yeah.

And so I, but even that, that is a really good lesson for me in not taking public policy as that is intended to be a good thing, as something that actually ends up being good for the people for whom it is, you know, sort of declaring that this kind of what we're doing for prisoners, they're not going to be in police cells over Christmas, screw you. Because, you know, I mean, it didn't matter with me so much, because I wasn't in for very long. And I had a whole bunch of women who would track me down and find me and visit me. And who could raise the funds. I mean, there wasn't a lot of money sloshing around. But somebody would find some money and there would be you know, I would be visited. There are a lot of a lot, most women in prison for whom that is not the case. Who whose families don't have the resources to find out where the hell they are, who don't have the money to go and visit them who don't have the time to go and visit them if they're halfway across the bloody country. I mean, it's really weird when Holloway shut down. And there's nothing humanitarian about the it was just a big chunk of real estate North London, of course, they're going to sell it. And there's a bit of me which thinks I ought to be delighted by that. There's another bit of me, which thinks where do the families of prisoners go when they can't get on a tube. So going to prison was, going to Greenham was one of the formative experiences of my life. Going to prison is another of the formative experiences of my life. And in fact, practically all the formative experiences of my life, being involved out, it was because of Greenham that I became involved in the Namibia support committee and going to Namibia and working with Southern

African activists was one of the formative experiences of my life. And I came through that because the British nuclear weapons program was using uranium that was being taken by Rossing from Namibian uranium mines, which is had huge problems for Namibian miners that, you know, they were and, you know, apartheid was in full swing and Namibia were occupied by South, you know, the South African apartheid state. So, I mean, it's, you know, the word intersectional is used now, but all these things are incredibly interlinked, which is why we ended up at Aldermaston. So, even stuff that I did later on, I can trace back to Greenham. All the stuff that was in the I mean, we had the one where I went, where I had a custodial, I did that with Lynn.

Oh, did you?

The one where I had a custodial, we had somebody from the Namibia support committee giving evidence about Namibian uranium.

Brilliant.

But different Jane from the other Jane.

Right.

Erm, was going to Nevada and doing a direct action against British nuclear testing. And that was organized by Rebecca because she was working for Greenpeace at the time. And again, one of the most formative experiences in my life, and they're not that many, I've just listed them all. Well, most of them apart from having a kid. And, you know, that can you know, I did it with other Greenham women as a as a sort of direct result of having been at Greenham against the British nuclear testing program.

So you were over in Nevada were you?

Yes.

Wow.

There was we used to have a yearly we, Britain, used to have a yearly nuclear weapons test. And on in Nevada, on Nevada testing site, and we knew when it was coming up. And we were approached. And we've set up and we went across to Nevada.

Who by? Who approached you?

Rebecca.

Oh, okay. Right. So activists in this country?

Yes. Well, she was working for Greenpeace at the time. Except I think she was on one of the she couldn't do it. For some reason. I think she was on one of the boats doing something. But she, you know, she was like, I know, competent women who can get this done. And so we all went across to Nevada, and we were hooked up with an activist there. And we spent three days walking across the desert across the test site was driven in the night onto the test site. And that's a very short way of, I mean, it all happened quite quickly. I mean, I was working I was working for it was my first job after Greenham. I was working for a little organization, which is still going and they're still lovely, called The Peace Tax Campaign, which now called Conscience: The Peace Tax Campaign, which is all about diverting money that goes to war to more, you know, sort of constructive enterprises. And so I'd taken a week off work to go to Nevada. And oh I loved the they were so kind to me, The Peace Tax Campaign they were brilliant. And, they kept my job open for me, while I was in prison. They were brilliant, because I've gone to prison after I started working for them. Lovely, lovely people.

That's great.

They were they were fantastic. I'm, I knew that at the time. But the older I get, the more I realized how fantastic they really were.

Did you, did you you run across the authorities in Nevada? I mean, were they different with you than in England?

No, ooh well, no what cuz we got, we'd gone, you know, this we're in America. And so we've been driven on to the test site and sort of dumped out in the middle of the night. And then the three me Jane, Julie and Michael, who was the sort of American who knew. So we sort of, you know, hiding from the planes going across the test site we had to carry all our water because of course you can't drink water on a nuclear test site it's a terrible idea.

Yeah.

We had Geiger counters with us. And there's different ways you can measure exposure. And again, I can't remember the details. But like there's one which will tell you how much it is per as you're going along.

Yeah.

And another which is accumulation and you sort of go to sleep and it's hit the top and you think, ooh, let's reset it. So you came with a ton of stuff, you're absolutely knackered I am. I mean, I'm certainly a lot more agile than I am now. But I'm not particularly good with heights and we're sort of going up the sides of bloody canyons and things like that. And it's a bit more complicated than this. But we actually got to the site where they were doing the explosion. It, it's more complicated than this, but about six minutes before it went off. And so they delayed it for half an hour. Because we, we were very, we knew we were very near this is a bit of a it sounds. Again, it's a bit of a sideshow. But it's a direct result of this. And it. So we're with we're knackered. We're carrying stuff, which, do you know, I wasn't I wasn't frightened at the time, I think the reason I wasn't frightened at the time is because I was so tired, you know. So we knew that we were right by the place where they do. I mean, Las Vegas is 100 miles away.

Yeah.

And they warn the authorities in Las Vegas, not to have people on scaffolding.

Wow.

Because you know, the seismic shocks and all the rest of it. So we knew we were very close. And then there's a point at which we see all the cars we hide in the bushes, kind of thing while all the cars stream away from the site, because they have this thing where it's like I'm like porter cabins or something like that or I can't even remember. And then all these cables and wires plunged down into a hole in the ground. And then there's the device that's underneath the ground, being the nuclear device. And I mean, if you look at sort of photographs of what, you know, the Nevada Test Site is covered by craters, basically, where they've done underground ground nuclear testing is to go to door. And so we think now's our chance. And I'm sent off first while they hide, except the place that we thought where it was wasn't the right place. And we're all on radios to each other. And so they will go off. And they found the right place, because I was and so then I, which is probably a good argument for having sent me off early in the first place. So then I then follow them. And they've all got to the spot, and I'm coming up. And there's this helicopter who comes behind me. And it lands on the path behind me while I'm sort of approaching where the other three are and where all these porter cabins and stuff are, and they're sort of telling me to lie on the ground and all the rest of it, and I'm so tired at this point, I just think of bugger that. And I go and meet the others and a couple have run off to hide so they can't be found. And I go on to the bit where all this stuff is happening. And the helicopter basically lands on top of me. It basically

hovers over me and just descends very slowly until I'm crouched on the ground with my hands over my head. And we're in the desert. So I'm in this sort of swirling thing of sand. And they just keep me on the ground with a helicopter over me until the security the Wackenhut come. And then the book is off and they arrest us all. And they blindfold us and they they blindfold us and they cuff us and they bung us in cars. And they drive like you wouldn't believe I mean blindfolding's a bit

Terrifying?

Well, I think blindfolding's a bit sort of, you know, meh.

Really?

We'd been there already, you know?

Okay. Sounds terrifying to me.

It was terrifying in that you. It's very difficult to measure time or distance when you're blindfolded. But they drove for about half an hour. And then they stopped and they parked up. And then we could feel the ground shake. And we knew they'd set it off. And that was upsetting.

Had your aim been to stop them from setting it off were you going to try and sabotage it or?

No, oh my god, Jesus no! I'm not gonna touch that machinery. To be honest, what I hadn't realized is that the American activist didn't think we would get there at all, but because we didn't know that it's one of those. I think we were supposed to be heroic failures.

Yes.

Which is hilarious because we had no idea that we were supposed to be heroic failures and then it's but that's the thing. It's I mean, you can do actual sabotage. And I don't it's not sabotage, it's kicking the door down of a burning building. I would not and I have been in situations where things I have touched have have had to be reviewed before they are then used for military purposes. But a) there's no way, I mean, any of us are going to go anywhere you know, really. But just being there was the point.

Right.

And they delayed it for half an hour. While they while they, and and, and I mean, one of the useful things was that it made for very dramatic headlines, when we got back to the UK, it was it was, you know, the tabloids were like Six Minutes from Nuclear Bomb, all that kind of stuff, which is, if is, you know, if you're trying to, you know, if you say putting this banner on a nuclear test, it's not very headline worthy is it?

If you're trying to draw attention to the fact that we do that once a year in Nevada, and all the rest if it.

Yes, but the but the absolute that the thing that was. I mean, I'd done a lot of actions. By that time, the thing that was transformative about that, to me, is that we've done it with the blessing and the cooperation and the permission of the Western Shoshone and most of the Nevada nuclear test site is on Western Shoshone land, Western Shoshone are a group of First Nation people. There's I don't have any, I think there's something I'm probably wrong, about 10,000 strong. There's all kinds of things about treaties. There's something called the Treaty of Ruby Valley. I haven't read about it in a long time. But there's there is a strong opinion based in reasonable fact, which says that the Shoshone never gave up their land. So the Shoshone say that they have, what happens on Shoshone land is their business, not the government's and the government shouldn't be blowing up nuclear weapons on it, which is fair point, really. And so when we went on to the land, we had been given permits by the western Shoshone to be on that land. And so when we came up in court, we were going, yep we got permission. Yes, we did. Yes, we were there. But we got permission from the people whose land it is. And of course, yeah, that's the record. Oh, yeah. But it was like, again, when, you know, you are making connections between the violence done to indigenous people. I mean, they, they've, you know, they've been at the forefront of anti nuclear activity and because it's happening on their land. So, yeah, all these connections. You know, we're using Namibian uranium, stolen from Namibian people at enormous cost to Namibian miners and to, you know, Namibian society as a whole. I mean, maybe it's tiny. I mean, Namibia's geographically huge, but the population is tiny. And then we're blowing up the land of another group of people.

It's that thing but the web, isn't it?

Yeah.

The Greenham Women talk about a lot with the web and interconnections. Can we talk a bit about um the things that you said you were there for four years? What was the day to day life of being someone living at the Greenham Common Peace Camp like?

Funnily enough, this em I, I've heard this phrase before I've been, I've just started reread, reading or have really can't get the word out, reading for the first time the Sharp novels, you know, this sort of historical potboilers of the Napoleonic war.

Yeah.

And this phrase comes up in that and come up with any description of military life that I've ever read ever read. Hurry up and wait.

Ah. Okay, yes.

And an awful lot of Greenham life was Hurry up and wait.

Okay.

It's only the endless sitting round the bonfire having a cup of tea. I mean, the thing is, and I had this experience, I lived in a housing Co Op about 20 years ago in Brixton, and there was a little taste of that there in tha if you have if you have a really and that was a politically based Co Op. With with activists from example, Namibia Support Committee and all that kind of stuff. If if you're in a location where a political activity is the norm, you can sit and have a cup of tea and have the world come and have a cup of tea with you. And I, as I said it start, I started very young. And I learned it's not to say I haven't changed my mind on some things. My thinking developed a lot over the years. But the cups of tea, were every bit as important as the, you know, the sort of dramatic actions with a pair of bolt cutters in your hand and yeah, and all the rest of it. And

Was that the consciousness raising time in a way?

Yes.

Pursuing the conscious-raising facts?

It also means I think, I mean, this is one of the things but I, I hope that a kind of network or structure or something is developing with Extinction Rebellion, because one of the things that made taking action possible was that I'd had time and space and opportunity to talk through practically everything, and to change my mind about things, and to read things and argue about things. And, you know, 10 Greenham women around a fire. 12 different opinions. And you know, and

Would you say once some groups and gates were more argumentative? Is it when you were living at one were there with sort of more particularly

They developed their own personalities. And you sort of, I mean, there's a certain amount of like gravitating to like, which is why so for example, I'd characterize blue gate as younger.

Yeah.

And sometimes very young and working class. And, you know, green gate's, a bit more sort of interested in the sort of spiritual side of life and orange gate quite down to earth. But that's too simplistic.

Okay.

And what I mean, stereotypes are there because there's a kernel of truth in them.

Yeah.

What I really liked about blue gate was their ridiculous sense of humour. I mean, somebody's given them a van. And it was one of those old fashioned vans, where you've got the sort of bit where you can sleep in the roof, and you put the roof up. Yeah. And somebody had written on that sleeping bags, because it could be sleeping bags, or it could be sleeping ... bags, because you know, and it was this sort of, I mean, that was a lot of great things as well. You take insults and you turn them around and, and own them. So we're just a bunch of old bags, but, um,

Blue gate, did they, were they a particular they, did they use a lot of them mentioned song, and lots of the Greenham Women remember different songs and do you do you associate that with blue gate, or was that, or with Greenham generally?

All of Greenham generally. The it's like if you watch Carry Greenham Home, the Beeban Kidron one the first one, have you seen her second one?

No, I haven't actually.

That. Oh, I'll tell you about that in a minute. But you know, it's the actual songs probably. I mean, they were sort of dirty versions of, you know, or not even dirty versions, but like, um, you know, that the Carry Greenham Home there was the official version, which is all sort of uplifting and, and then there was the standard version, which is Carry Greenham Home, we're too pissed to walk alone, Carry Greenham Home. And that my my suddenly. My favourite verse of that was some ridiculous thing. Woman toilet woman bad. Where the hell do you think you're at? Peanut brain in woolly hat? Go back to Russia. Go back to Russia, far away from Newbury, go back. And it's silly. But and it's not sort of heroic.

Yeah.

And, you know, We work for the Russians for tuppence a day. They ask us to stay here, And that's why we stay, we drink lots of vodka and that's why we're gay, hey! And you do that faster and faster and faster. And yeah, you take all the things that are thrown at you.

Yeah.

And you turn them into ludicrous little ditties.

Yeah.

Not these sort of sweeping heroics.

No, you not the, Can't Kill the Spirit?

Well I like Can't Kill the Spirit. It's

I'm just saying, they're a very different vibe aren't they?

It's a very different vibe. Make that making a cup of tea. Yeah. Okay, so making a cup of tea. You've got to have the water to make a tea which is you've got to get to the standpipe to fill up water bottle of water carrier thing. So if you're not yellow gate, you have to get somebody to with a car which isn't always easy to drive around to the gate to fill up the water bottle and you've got to get the standpipe from from the van out of yellow gate and set it up. Fill up putting take the standpipe back.

Is that the only place to get water is yellow gate?

Yes.

Gosh.

They had a standpipe and so then you take it back unless somebody brings it with them. And fill the kettle then you've got to get the wood. Either people go and bring wood, or you go and gather wood. Then you got to build fire up. There was a whole period of time, it lasted about a year and a half. When the council and the police and the base we're trying to get rid of us. And it was this sort of I mean, this happened all the time anyway, but this was a particularly intense period. And they do this thing where they'd have a van parked near the camp, whichever camp it was, or at yellow gate, they'd have it sort of inside the main gate, that the base gate where you'd get a fire going and you'd have the kettle on top of you'd have something cooking whatever. And they'd rush out of the van or they rush out to the gate with, um, a jug of water basically, and they'd put out the fire.

Oh!

And they'd kick all the bits about um and then you think, oh fucking hell, so you'd pile all these sort of damp embers up and then you make another fire and then you put the kettle back on another and Hazel who's like I said she's passed away now. She remembers that time as, because it was it was during summer and you know the fire just going, fnk! And oh there again speaking of silly songs, somebody did a wonderful, wonderful version of Smoke Gets in Your Eyes. And I do not have a singing voice so I will just sort of (singing) A policeman said to me, as he poured water on my tea. Aaaaah. This land is military, kept exclusively, for plea, no, this land is MOD, kept exclusively for police and military. Oh, when you joined the force, was it to run through gorse? Aaaaah. 12 men in a van, with a watering can, is that how you began? The policeman he replied, as he kicked the logs aside. Aaaaah. At first I had my doubts, but they tell so many lies, smoke gets in your eyes.

Hah! That's really good!

And that is pretty much the story of that summer trying to make a cup of tea. When, I mean you think, you look back on it you think what were they thinking?

Yeah.

Jesus!

So petty apart from anything else.

So petty, when you think of police cuts and you think of how long it takes to get anything done. And you think of

And they're wasting that sort of time doing that?

Yeah. 12 men in a van with a watering can, and you just think oh for goodness sakes.

What were your relationships like with the because the MOD and there was the English army wasn't there and there was the American army?

The English, well the British Army were there to be a buffer between us and the Americans.

Yeah.

We had it was a very odd relationship with the British police. Now, I we had quite a good relationship. This sounds odd. And the Thames Valley police had a reputation of being terrible. And they were quite a lot at the time. Individuals, now, the especially at Emerald gate because you'd have, you know, I don't know every 150 yards or something? You'd have squaddies, British squaddies, sort of guarding the fence.

Right.

And they would be so bored. Very, very, very bored indeed. And they'd talk to you. And you could actually, you know, they were desperate for a chat and they'd occasionally be posted singly or sometimes they'd sort of do a joint shift together like they do two shifts, but two of them, just whatever. And like in winter at Emerald gate there was, you know, and like these were probably my age, you know, this is the weird thing. I was very young. They were very young. A lot of them. They didn't know how to make a fire. You know, it's snowing and they've got what are those called, braziers.

Yeah.

And so we'd throw them over um kindling.

To help them?

Yeah. And we had one lot, a sweet couple of lads who said, do you want some coal? And we were like, sure why not. And so, bless them, they had this army issue coal, they tried to throw a bag of coal over the fence. And of course, it's quite a high fence and they've got three rolls of barbed wire on the top and it catches in the barbed wire. And so it drops down. It's now full of little tiny holes. And so they go, oh that's not gonna work. Why don't you cut a hole in the fence? And we go, alright then! And there's literally snow on the ground. So we cut a hole in the fence and they shove it through the hole. And we just sort of, you know, rappel the fence back to where it was. And we went by the silos. And because the coal bag now has little holes in it, there's this sort of little trail of coal dust to this badly sort of put together hole in the fence. And, and I mean, you know, some of them are wankers and some of them were lovely, and most of them I mean, we did have we did have ones who showed up to say hello. One member of the MOD police sent his mum round with a load of, well not sure if he sent his mum round. I'm sure she had her own views about it. I'm sure she's perfectly capable of saying no, if she didn't want to. But his mum came round with a load of firewood.

Aaw.

I had this odd thing. There was a small number of us who had our own personal DIs. Like if I got most of the actions I did, I didn't do at Greenham. I went elsewhere, I did them at Aldermaston, I did one at Weathersfield, that oh what the hell's it called? Burfield. You know, I did them elsewhere at Welford. I did them elsewhere in the country. And I use Greenham I did do stuff at Greenham but I also did stuff elsewhere. Anywhere I got arrested in the country, I would have a particular DI Frank Mason turn up and his Sergeant who was called Jane. So I had I have somebody sort of assigned to me. And I and Lynn had um Frank and that as well. There was a few other women who had the same thing.

Why was that then, was that coz you were repeat offenders, sort of thing, or?

Possibly. But it was actually very convenient, because you got arrested in one place and then you got arrested in another place. And then they gave you the same court date and you can't be in Banbury, and, and Reading at the same time or whatever. But because DI Mason is also going to be there. He's the one who arranges for it. So it was not set up for our convenience. It was set up for their's. I have no doubt of that. But actually, it was quite convenient. And there's a there's a certain amount of I mean, there's this wonderful, wonderful woman who founded and ran an organization called Women in Prison. Have you heard of them?

Yes, I have, yeah.

They do Clean Break and all the rest of it.

Yes, they're great aren't they?

And Chris, she was called Chris Tchaikovski. I got to meet her through my aunt, you know, the amazing one. And you have never met a more charismatic woman in your life, honestly, on it. Seriously, she's really extraordinary woman. And her argument was that Greenham women were not so very different from other women prisoners. And I think she was right. And I think one of the ways in which she was right, is that you have this sort of weird sort of practical arrangement with police in some ways. It's almost normalized. You're you're having you know, you're

You're in a relationship of a sort with them?

Yes! But it's like, you know, we did an action at Welford after Britain bombed Libya. And that bombing. One of the casualties in that bombing was one of Gaddafi's daughters. It was an adopted daughter, she was six months old, and it wouldn't matter whose adopted daughter she was. It's a baby. And Frank had had we knew Frank had had a baby and it was like, I remember, one of our questions on the stand was do you think a six month old baby girl is capable of terrorism? And he was, quite rightly, incredibly freaked out and distressed by that because I, you know, I can tell you when I mean, I don't know if you have kids, but your your, you know, your whole sort of your sort of projection as a as a new parent is enormous.

Yeah.

And it was it was a very hard thing to ask him, but I think it was a necessary one. Because if our children are worth protecting, as much as I that oh, god, that's another thing. I'd forgotten about that. No, I hadn't. Because, you know, I mentioned Julie, the one we went to Nevada with?

Yes.

Me and Julie went to Libya, and got thrown out of Libya.

Oh, my God.

Because we got it was after was it? When was it? It was before we did that action.

Before the Nevada one?

No, no, it was well before the Nevada one. It was before we did the action that the well, because we which one was that? And that wasn't a Welford action. That was what's it called? Where they had the F1 elevens. Near Bambury. There's a oh Upper Heyford.

Sorry.

Because the this is all incredibly disjointed. Okay, I'm sorry. So we knew the planes were going to go from Upper Heyford to bomb Libya. And we thought this was an incredibly bad idea. Not because I mean, it's, it's not going to improve our chances of war.

Yeah.

You know, bombing a country in the middle of the night versus a diplomatic solution.

Yeah.

It's it's not a peacekeeping operation. It's not something that will improve our security.

No.

And it's not something that will take out Gaddafi. It kill some of his people. It's not going to take out him.

No.

So anyway, we knew this was going to happen. So I think there was one, two, four of us, five of us, five of us, again, I'm terrible with numbers. Who went to Upper Heyford in the middle of the night, we just cut in, I mean, that bearing in mind, this is this is an operation or military base run by the Americans, which is gearing up for a military action. So you know, if I had

Yet you could just cut in?

Yeah. So we go in, and we sort of standing around Upper Heyford and we go into a hangar and there are two it's brightly lit, full of soldiers full of American soldiers. It's got two F1 elevens which have got, you know, fuel cables. They are loading bombs onto the plane. We're like, alrighty then! And me and Katrina, climb up and they've got those little stairs that go into the cockpit?

Yeah.

I do not know why we did this. But we did. We went up the stairs Katrina got into the cockpit thought this is a bad idea got out of the cockpit. And we sat at the top of the stairs by the cockpit because we don't touch anything. Don't touch anything!

Yeah!

And the others were because they were bombs you know that there were missiles that were being and so they were painting on the missiles because if the thing is if you if you paint a missile if you put paint on a missile, you can't use it as a missile because it buggers up the aerodynamics of it.

Ah! Handy!

I presume if it's blobby paint that was something I presume I don't know anything about I should know more about aerodynamics than I do but nevermind. So and of course they freak out. The soldiers freak out they half of them rush out you got ones coming in we were all arrested, lalalalala, and they that the flight went off that night, but it didn't go off with the two that we'd been in the hangar with. Not because we'd done anything to them, but because they needed to check that we hadn't done anything to them. Now. Like I said to you about the previous thing if it's something where you don't know what you're doing, you don't touch anything.

Yeah.

Because

Who knows what it's gonna do.

Who's not you know that there's a warplane there.

Yeah.

And full of fuel. You're not going to touch anything. But the fact that we'd been in the hangar with them the fact that we've been sitting at the top of the stairs, so they

How were they with you? How what was their what was their manner like with you?

Stop! Upset. Um, there have been times when I have been I have felt in danger of my life. I don't remember that was one of them.

That's interesting. But other times with mill when you've been arrested or been held by the military or whatever, you felt in danger?

Yes.

But not this time?

But I don't remember that doesn't mean I didn't feel it at the time. But I when I look back on it. I don't feel that. I don't think, I know I didn't feel it in Nevada, and that realistically.

Yeah.

I was in danger. I was in danger either of physical injury from the bomb going off when we were on the site. And at least from broken bones, if not from anything else.

And from the helicopter that hovered over you.

Yeah.

And all sorts of things. Yeah.

For there was um, oh what are those big spiders?

Tarantulas?

Tarantulas, that's right, we saw Tarantulas.

Really!

Yeah.

Ah! So you were in danger from the actual physical world, as well!

Yeah. So I was too tired then to

Care.

Feel pretty, really tired. But yeah, so we we got before that happened, because I remember the reason why I knew it was before. Because again, I'm terrible on dates. I remember in the van that was taking us to Holloway, one of the screws and one of the police said, you should go and protest in Libya or something. And I said, well, we've just been thrown out of Libya. And she didn't believe us. And I was I remember feeling very sort of

Indignant.

Yeah. But we really, really have. And that was me and Julie.

Were you frightened of, for your safety in Libya? Was that frightening?

There were moments, yes, yes. They we had got this bizarre invitation which Greenham and diplomatic relations had been severed by then. So it was through through somebody else, like the Maltese government or something I can't remember. I've probably slandered The Maltese by that, saying, Do you want to go to this conference in Libya? And our sort of base collective thing was, we will talk to anybody.

Yeah.

And we will not hold back how we feel about things, but we will talk to anybody. I went, mostly because I was one of the few people that had a passport.

Right.

And a fair chance of getting back into the country. And Julie was the same. And so we went, and it was this conference held in Tripoli. I mean, this is right in the sort of, this is in Mad Dog Gaddafi, kind of, you know, when that was, it was right in the heart of the crisis. And he basically, I mean, he was accused at the time and it was absolutely right, that he was funding all sorts of things around the world. It was it was a mixture of people. Many, many desperate people, tiny little indigenous organizations, big political things. And then the SWP was there, which was

They really did get everywhere.

God, that awful, man, that awful man, what was his name? You know, the really creepy one who has since died? Who had all the accusations against him? I'm sure he was there. A few 100 people, and he was it was this sort of thing. You know, creating the green army. And we me and Julie we're assigned a minder this lovely woman who was described herself as a man, older woman, older Libyan woman. And so we started talking to people. And trying to, you know, people sort of asked us. And there weren't very many women at this conference, there was about 30. And we're talking hundreds of people. And there wasn't very many people from Europe or America, there was a group from America. Not a very big group, because it was illegal to go from America then I believe.

Right. Okay.

And it was a weird mixture. I mean, my I knew very little of a lot of the situation of a lot of people there in that I mean, they were, you know, like I said tiny little indigenous groups from all over the place, as well as really dodgy people that you wouldn't want to align yourself with. And we tried to talk to them all. And it was just trying to explain that, you know, your, your, you know, as a sort of feminist pacifist

Yeah.

You have every bit of subject as much objections to you know anyone else's missiles and army as you do the British or the Americans, you can imagine how well that went down. But you know we

talked to lots of people and it was nice. We met some very nice people. And then the first day of the actual conference proper started. And we're in this hall with about 600 people. And they do this sort of praise chanting, they lock the doors. That's always a fun moment. And the lined, the wall, oh it's raining! The walls are lined with Gaddafi's bodyguard, who are all these young women. So the praise singing came up. And then this is to cut a sort of long story short, Gaddafi came into the room. The entire hall leapt to their feet. And I hadn't actually discussed this with Julie. But we had this sort of we kept sitting, because, and Julie was sitting there going, Oh, god, oh, god, oh, god, oh, god. I'm sitting there thinking, we're going to be shot, we're going to be shot, we're going to be shot, we're going to be shot. But neither of us could bring ourselves to stand up and cheer because what's the point? What's the point of us? What is the point of us? If we're gonna do that? It was what the joy of going with Julie, is that we didn't have to discuss it.

Yeah.

It was just automatic. She wasn't gonna stand up. I wasn't gonna stand up. We weren't gonna be doing. And you just think, oh shit! Everybody, you know, tumultuous applause chantings and everybody sits down again. And this is a sort of weird comic interlude. Now we'd been given these goodie bags for this sodding conference. And in the goodie bag, I mean, it had all sorts of bizarre things like copies of the Green Book. I've got a Gaddafi bootlace tie. I still have that, don't have much of the rest of it. But I have the tie. And and there was this cartoon it was like a graphic novel. But it was a graphic novel as of Gaddafi own life, you know, Gaddafi standing up to his imperialist teachers, Gaddafi doing this, you know, all of the other manly sort of rather dodgy cartoon book, because for some reason I had, because I'd been rooting through them, as you do at the beginning of conference thinking, what the hell is this, I and I had this cartoon back in my, in my hands, when I'm sitting down, everybody settles down, everybody sits down, the man in front of me turns around and snatches the comic book out of my hand, because I'm not worthy to have it. And, just you know, oh shit. And And at this point, people start to avoid us quite naturally.

Yeah.

And not everybody, but they do. Because and I don't blame them. You know?

Yes. It's dangerous.

You don't you don't want to? Yeah. And so we carry on going to the conference try to talk to people. And then we think bugger this! You know, actually, no, we don't. There is a point and so with thought, well we're in Libya, we'll have a look around Tripoli. And you can imagine in the middle of this crisis, it wasn't a hotspot for tourism. And we every morning to go to this. And this is literally in the space of a few days that the coach arrives and it takes you to the conference venue from the hotel. And we didn't have any money, and we didn't have any, our passports had

been taken away. And so we hide in our hotel room. Um until the coaches have gone, so we don't have to go to this conference.

Who's got your passports at this point?

The whoever's running this thing.

Oh no!

And so as we're hiding in the hotel room, our hotel room bursts in, and these two guys come in, like they're gonna search the room, except we're sitting there. And then, it's just, it's just this bizarre thing when

They thought they were gonna go through your stuff, because you weren't there?

Yeah. And we were like, hmm

Hi there!

It was this ridiculous series of comedic interludes.

What did they do?

We were all just it was all terribly awkward. And, you know, and then we thought, and so we had a walk around Tripoli, which was nice in a slightly bizarre way. Other things, and we talked, and we did actually talk to the Americans, which was interesting. It, it was that those are the sort of really peculiar highlights.

Yeah.

And then on the Thursday, there was due to be a tour of the, and we're still trying to explain to people but we're doing at Greenham because they think oh, you're anti American.

Yes. Yeah.

That's why you're here and it's like, we're not anti American. In fact, there's actually a lot of American women at Greenham.

Yeah.

And we're anti militarism. We're anti nuclear. We are anti violence, we are trying to create something new. And anyway, so there was due to be a tour of a Libyan military site on the first day. And on the Wednesday night, I think I think I've got my dates right. On the Wednesday night. We had a phone call at five in the morning, saying, Be ready, cuz the plane leaves that night?

Oh, no, really.

And that was that. And that was so when we got back. And if this woman in this, this police officer, or whoever she was, in this van, as we pull up to Holloway is saying, Go and protest in Libya. Well, actually!

Funny you should say that!

Funny you should say, it was funny, because it was just a bizarre coincidence

Yeah.

That it was the two because it could have been, you know?

Yeah, it could have been any of you. Um, how did did Greenham pay for a for you to go and do that? Was there like a collective fund that women could go off and talk about it?

No, that was paid for by I think the Maltese or something? Who?

Oh, right.

Which seems very sort of, I mean, yes, we were bad guests. But they invited us. And if you're gonna, yeah, don't do something. And I try. I'm dealing with the same things now. If I'm going to be part of something, then I'm going to try and remain true to the purpose of that. I'm going to try I mean, you can be diplomatic, at various degrees, you can compromise if there are things which do not betray your principles. But there are points at which you actually go, yeah. This has to be done.

Yeah.

And yeah, so.

Yeah.

That was that.

So when we was just before we turned the recorder on, actually, we were talking about my mum taking me to Greenham as a kid because she was a visitor and, and you asked if you, you know, about her name and things. And I was saying, well she didn't really live there, so she would call herself an ally rather than a perhaps a full time Greenham woman, or anything like that. And you said, Oh, we'll talk about that. So what were you going to say?

Let me bring out my high horse. So I can climb upon it.

Yes, please do.

Right. Okay. What is a Greenham woman? A Greenham woman is any damn woman who wishes to call herself a Greenham woman. And I really, really, I think it's antithetical to the both the spirit and the practicality of Greenham to divide women into camp women who live there, and visitors who do not.

Okay.

And it's funny, the squaddies that we used to know at Emerald had a term they used to call some of the women SAS, Saturdays and Sundays. But it's a false division. And it's a false division, both philosophically and practically. Like they were women I knew, there's this amazing, amazing woman who was a retired Catholic school teacher, who drove like a rally driver on speed. Who could follow a cruise convoy in the middle of the night like nobody you've ever met in your life.

absolutely extraordinary woman loved her to bits. She's she's she died in her 80s and she died quite some time ago. And, and, and I'm pretty sure she I think we all sort of, you know, talked her out of it in the end, but she's exactly the sort of person who'd go, ooh I never lived there. Yeah, but she was there, you know, over a long period of time, you know, she still had a house she still did other things. She was very heavily involved in refugee which she was one of the early sort of workers in the refugee welcome movement and in way back when

Yeah.

Er in Oxford, and, where was she living? Anyway whatever. And but if you want to be sort of utilitarian about it, hour by hour, she was there a lot more than many women who say, Ooh, yes, I lived there. But I mean, I lived there exactly as long as I wanted to. And when I didn't want to anymore. I left and the women who spend a day there who spent a weekend there who spend a week there who spend a month or will come once once a year, or have come twice in their life. Or, and this this whole division into Greenham women and supporters is also a false division I, there are times in my life where I have found it easier to say, for example, sit in the middle of the road during a blockade, or cut a fence and go into a nuclear base, that I have to knock on a row of my neighbour's doors. And, you know, say I'm doing a sponsored la dee, da dee da for whatever. And they are all different forms of work. And if Greenham was just, if, if you divided Greenham into women who said they lived there, and the women who called themselves supporters, or visitors or any of those other iterations, then Greenham would be a fraction of what it was and it would be lesser. And that is not true, it does not reflect it dividing Greenham women up into visitors and Greenham women or divide Greenham more wrapped into supporters and Greenham women does not reflect the reality of Greenham. And women who spent a short time either once in their life, or as often as they like, are every bit as much Greenham women if they choose to be so as ones who, I mean, there are a women who would call themselves Greenham women who came, who had this intense burst of activity, and then left and were never seen again. And that's fine, too.

Yeah. And that's kind of part of Carry Greenham Home in a way isn't it, is that you it might affect you enough that day that changes what you do when you take yourself away from Greenham. Take it home with you.

But in term but in terms of actual camp life? You know, it's like the women who come up and again, I think a lot of them saw themselves as supporters who would do a night shift. If you're waiting for the convoy or if we if we're experiencing a lot of attacks.

Yeah, that's what my mum did, that sort of stuff.

Yeah. They all, it's it's like any, any sort of functioning thing, every part of you take one part out of it, the rest of it falls apart. All those are part of it and and that, that whole supporters and

Greenham women thing, I think is philosophically and practically untenable. And and not helpful. And just not true. You know?

Yeah. Lovely. I'll direct women to that answer when they worry about that some some of the women I've interviewed have been a bit like, Oh, well, I didn't live there, you know, or whatever. And it's like their experiences with just as valid, their interviews were fascinating.

Yes.

All, like you say, it's all

And in many ways, it was easier when you were living there to have that constant network and that constant support. And, you know, if you're going to court in Newbury, you know there's going to be women outside of the court. If you're then if you're if you've come and visited from wherever the hell and you end up in magistrates in wherever you are,

Yeah.

It's there's a, the thing about living at Greenham is that there's a certain drama about it.

Right.

And that drama is quite helpful in a lot of ways, because it attracts attention. It's I mean, it's dramatic. I mean, that's the whole point. It doesn't mean that the things that have less obvious drama, are easier. And again, I see this I've been I was very heartened with the Extinction Rebellion stuff this time around. Because I mean there was plenty of drama. But they kind of got there was more understanding of when to step back. When to regroup. When other people needed to step forward, there was more sort of they were planning for the longer term.

Yes, less, not so much machismo, maybe in a way.

Yes. Very much so. And, yeah, it's just that thing of just because it's dramatic, doesn't mean it's more difficult.

Yeah.

And, and I think, and I, and it's been interesting seeing it play out with a sort of new set of a new set of activists, including people who will have been activists in other things over over a long period of time is it's exactly that, machismo. It just because something doesn't have dramatic flair. Doesn't mean it's easy. It can be the most difficult thing to do to, you know, talk at a local meeting or knock on your neighbour's door, or raise money or be the one who sorts a like there was a I mean, I wasn't a Quaker then although this is how I came into Quakerism. But there was a Quaker in a meeting up north like Cumbria, who invented something known as a getaway. There's a Lynette's got one, she lent it to the local museum. It was because during the evictions, you had a matter of minutes to pick up all your stuff and stop it being put into the muncher. And somebody in Cumbria meeting or something sat down and thought ooh how about, and they invented this wonderful, wonderful tent, it was a single skinned, single person tent made out of three hooped sort of try it was a triangular tent. I don't think sort of hooped tents had been invented then.

Yeah.

So it was like old fashioned tent tubing that sort of aluminium tubing.

Yeah.

Um in. So if you can imagine three L shapes,

Yeah.

With the sort of corner of the L at the top?

Right?

Sewn into a tent with an integral ground sheet. And there was a pointy bit at the end of each of the L L. So you could literally plonk the three things into a row. So it made up a tent, it didn't have a top crossbar or anything like that, but he didn't need one. And then sewn into each end of this sort of pup tent was a single tent peg. So the entire tent had two tent pegs and a pointy bit at the end of each of the L shapes which kept the tent in the tent shape. And you could literally, un, unpitch it that's the word,

Yeah.

**You pitch your tent, you un, well whatever, by had to run, scooping your hands through the three
Ls and pick the whole damn thing up off the ground, and I don't know if there would not be I
mean, it was only a single skin. So you know, you had to be a bit careful with it. But it was
waterproof and lalalalala. And somebody thought and designed that and invented it and then
raised up enough money from other Quakers, to um, have a bunch of them made and then sent
them to us. And they were brilliant! I spent many a happy night in that, you know, getaway. And
you know, that's**

That's a huge contribution. Yeah.

That's a huge contribution! Massive! I will remember that always.

Yeah.

**It was an absolutely brilliant thing for somebody to do. And I have no idea if they ever came to
Greenham at all. Um, so**

Yeah, nice answer, I like all of that. That's really lovely to hear.

**Yeah, and also, this whole thing about hierarchies. You know, this, it's, again, with the drama. I
mean, I my my Greenham narrative has a certain amount of drama in it, because of the Nevada
thing because of the Libya thing because of the prison thing. Because lalalalalala if I'd spent four
years at Greenham getting on with talking to people, with maintaining the life of the camp, with
welcoming other people in with making sure everything functioned with doing whatever, you
know, doing. I mean, that would have been every bit as valid. And I did those things anyway,
because everybody did them. But yeah. The when I think of the difficult things, actually what I
think of when I think of my whole life, I mean, I don't when I look back on, you know, Nevada. I
look back on it with warmth and fondness. I don't experience it as trauma, you know what I
mean? So, ooh yeah, we did that. Whereas other things are much more difficult.**

Yeah.

So it, which is not

Context is everything.

Context is everything. And it's not always clear if you have not been involved in that.

Yes. Looking back on it.

So in that, yeah. So those things were a kind of gift to me. Rather than yeah, you know what I mean?

Lovely.

I think I've said it enough, but there you go.

Well, I've got a final question for you. And it's one we're asking everyone that we interview, just try and keep a sense of unity if we if we want to pick anything out of everyone's answers, sort of thing because they've been quite diverse, and the interviewers have all been quite diverse as well. Um but the question is, could you explain why you think it's important, if you do, that Greenham is remembered by subsequent generations?

Well, there's a thing that the point of Greenham history is that it's collective. And I have been involved in a number of political movements like the I'm in my involvement with the Namibia Support Committee was, as you know, a branch, if you like, of the sort of broader anti apartheid movement, although it was, it was sort of quite specific. And in any political movement, you get stuff which is produced at the time for sort of campaigning purposes, and which is subsequently used as sort of part of the historical record. And you get stuff which is written as polemic, to change people's minds, you get stuff which is written immediately post to the thing to either justify yourself or to say that you are completely irrelevant, irrelevant, or whatever. And I've seen all that happen with practically every sort of political in, you know, thing I've been involved in. I think with a collective, I think there's two things about Greenham, which mean a lot of women's work is in at the micro level, and at the macro level. And this is a generalization, but nevermind. A lot of women's work is rendered invisible, because people think that elves did it, in the night, it happened magically with no actual input involved. And the thing about a lot of Greenham is that we did it on tuppence. It was women with no money. No time, women were carving, I mean, you were talking about your mum? She had you. And women were carving time out of their lives that they did not have to spare. They were carving money out of their lives that they did not have to spare, they were carving emotional energy out of their lives that they did not have to spare. And all those women created something that changed things, it changed public policy at a national level. And not necessarily because, you know, I mean, Britain didn't go unilateralist and is unlikely to do anytime soon. But you create the conditions in which people make decisions in a different way than they would have before. And it changed the international situation as part of a larger whole. And it changed individual women to a massive extent, some of whom have then many of whom have then gone on to create other things. It changed a way of working the way I learned to work at Greenham, a collaborative way has shaped my entire life. And I believe it's done the same for a lot of other women. All those things of women who did not have the time who did not have the money who did not have the energy, and who did it anyway. And to have that as a well, you

know, the idea that all that that political movement would have happened without that work. It's not true. And so, why I am grateful for any initiative that records it is partly because, well, there were a number of reasons partly because elves didn't do it in the night. We did it. I did it, your mum did it. Loads of other women did it. The second is we learnt from people who come before us, sometimes well, sometimes not at all well. And sometimes we sort of learnt it along the way. And it's helpful to I mean, one of the things that's hugely affected my relationship with looking at how Extinction Rebellion work is, you know, we have seen patterns before. And experience can be useful, experience. Because, you know, this is the most exhausting thing about all of this. It's not like you can, you can have a campaign, you can win and it's all fixed and you can go and have a rest and raise bees like Sherlock! You know, you know! It's just like and here we are again.

Yeah.

And now even if the INF I mean, that's not a failure in that the INF was in place for that length of time. And the INF was not the only successor Greenham. But we have to do this again and again and again, on so many funds on so many issues, and

You don't want to reinvent the wheel.

We don't want to reinvent the wheel. And we and actually the nature it, it's I have been very fortunate in that I have been part of political movements, which won and so and I'm quite cheerful about a lot of things and I'm absolutely bloody terrified at a whole bunch more. Absolute, I mean, I've, oof, anyway, that's, do you know, one of the most. Have you seen The Force Awakens?

Yes.

Right. I took my teenage son and his teenage friend to see The Force Awakens in the IMAX at the Science Museum.

Nice parenting, well done.

So yes, 70, 70 millimeter. And there was a point at which I thought I would just combust with joy. Because I saw Star Wars the first time round.

Yeah. Me too.

And there was General Organa, at Greenham. And you know, the, the rebel base was filmed at Greenham?

Oh right, okay.

Ooh, did you not? Go and have another look, at it's really, really, really distinctive.

Really?

Once you've seen it, I'll actually look it up on my phone and show you after we finish this. The you know the rebel base where General Organa is doing her whole thing. and lalalalala.

Yeah.

Those are the silos at Greenham. They filmed them at Greenham.

No! Oh my goodness!

And it was like these, I saw I saw Star Wars as a teenager. I was at Greenham as a teenager, and there was Leia running the resistance from Greenham, and every single hair on the back of my neck goes up and I'm like, oh my God, I've died and gone to heaven!

That's so cool!

And it was it was, of you know, they've CGI'd the back so it looks you're on some bloody alien planet but what, it was. Yes, yes. And actually Greenham is is a a you know meadow, wildlife sanctuary yada, yada, yada, and the rest of the world is in a total shit state and I'm absolutely terrified. But. We need not be without hope. And we can use what we have learned in the past and what we have done in the past. Not necessarily to repeat the past but to try and do the present even better.

Yeah.

So that's why we need it. And it's why we need biographies of women who died before Wikipedia became a thing. And it's why we need People's History. It's, it's, you know, all these things are not for the purposes of nostalgia.

No.

It's for the purposes of getting up and having to do it all fucking again. And do it well, and do it better. And to do it with heart and

Knowledge.

And knowledge. Exactly.

Yeah, lovely.

But yeah, do go watch The Force Awakens.

Oh, I shall watch it again with a new eye.

Genuinely thrilling! Genuinely thrilling!