

Di McDonald

Should we like, start with your story? Back at the beginning. How did you get involved in the first place?

Okay, well, I went to Greenham when it first started and we just went to an event.

Yes.

And then carried on going after that.

So did you stay overnight or we just like a day tripper?

Well, it's this whole thing about Greenham Women Everywhere.

Yeah.

Erm, and we didn't have that term for it in those days.

Right.

We didn't invent a system that would work we just ambled about doing what we thought needed doing at the time - and so sorry, what was your first question? Sorry.

I was just just saying, you went to Greenham, and what was it Embrace the Base or something like that that you went to first?

No much before then, because I was involved in, you know, working on the, that event.

Oh, right. So and, did you erm so you were involved right from the beginning?

Yes. I know what you asked me, if I stayed the night.

Yeah.

Yes. Well, I have a big family and they were very small children. So I wasn't able, I didn't want to and didn't need to stay all the time. But I work very closely with women and I stayed a lot of the time. And I lived at camp for a few days a week, particularly when there was the big evictions and everything was being taken by the bailiffs.

Oh, god.

And you just needed as many hands to the pump at that time.

Which, which gate was your gate? Because we all had our, our favourites!

So yeah, of course it changed over the years. To start with when there was only one camp at one gate which was at the main gate.

Yeah.

And oh there were tipis and all sorts of things then right at the beginning, that would be in '80, '82 or '81, '80. Well, anyway, whatever it was. And, and so learnt a lot being at Greenham about women, women's ways of working.

Yes.

And so that was great. And I was able to do actions. And so I learned about doing that. And I learned about court cases and defending yourself and so on. So there was a lot to learn. And I learned lots of songs.

Yes, the songs the songs!

You know, I learned to fill in the latrine.

Oh, gosh, digging the latrine in the shape of a women's symbol. I remember doing that.

Yes. Which was just, you know, very formally known as the shit pit.

Yes, of course. So, so Di. Where was your - so you were there a few days a week. Where was your home then? Where was your?

Well, I started going when I lived in Oxford, and so

It wasn't too far away.

Yes. Yeah not too far away, exactly. Yeah, it must have been before '82, we must have gone in '81.

Yeah.

Just not long after the well I think I can't remember what it was but anyway, there was some gathering and there was still men going then. Yeah, which was good cos the babies I had small children and three of them were triplet babies and so it meant that Paul could come with me. Yeah, he'd have one on

his front and one on his back and I'd have one on my back.

Oh my word.

And my three other kids as well would come along so

Wow.

The other one and even the triplets as they got older you - they very much enjoyed going to camp.

Oh, I bet! What a great way to grow up!

It was good. They did enjoy it.

Oh, how fabulous. So were you in the Oxford CND then? Was that where you

No it was called Campaign Atom.

Oh.

In Oxford.

Oh, right.

And it grew up in parallel with CND groups all over. It's now called Oxford CND. But in the '80s it wasn't. Not until the '90s I don't think it changed its name.

Campaign Atom, righto. And then - so you were there at the camp. And then how did you make the step from being a protester at the base to be involved in Cruise Watch, because it's quite a different thing really, isn't it?

Yes. Well, what evolved was the convoys started to come out of the base.

Yes.

Exercise out in the countryside.

Uh huh.

And some women were able to video the first time it came out, which was brilliant. So then we knew what we were looking for and what it was like, because they would only come out at night.

Yes.

So very often not leave the base until 11 or 12, or even later. And then they'd go and find their site where they were going to stay for about a week.

Mm hmm.

And then they would come back, and they'd come back in the middle of the night and arrive back at Greenham about three in the morning. So it was - became clear that women who were at camp had got enough to do.

Yeah.

Surviving, dealing with the bailiffs going to court cases, just even washing your hair, all these sort of important things. And a lot of women were in prison for a few days or weeks, at any one time. So the pressure was on for a rather different kind of groups that could take on in cooperation with women at camp.

Yeah.

And there was a lot of crossover between us.

Of course, yes.

This - watching the bases. Watching all around the base, but not close. Because men were involved - there was no need anyway, and they didn't want to. And so the watching was done from cars, roundabouts, key logistical locations, all round about between one and four miles out of Greenham.

Yeah.

And so different groups joined in from who were from, you know, Bristol, where they could get get home and have a few hours sleep before they needed to go to work, basically. And it was every night of the, every night of the year.

Wow. Where were they, where were the convoys headed to? Was it Salisbury Plain?

In the end, they had to settle on Salisbury Plain because that was the safest place for them. They did one or two other places, and one place in particular, called Longmoor Camp in Hampshire, near Liss. They went there early in November '84. And they got into a real pickle then because the policing was

- they were really in a big panic. And so the policing was very bad and they put us all in a pit.

Oh, my God. We were talking about the early days of the camp. So did you get involved with your Oxford group? The - what was it again, the atom?

Campaign Atom. No, not really because I mean, I was involved with that anyway.

Yeah.

Before when it was first announced in 1979 - well not 1979 because I was busy then. But the next year when - anyway, we were protesting against the idea of the Americans coming to have a base with nuclear weapons just down the road. Thank you. So, so yeah, we we were involved in protests there. Yes. That's right. Because there was a an early warning system place near in Oxford.

Right.

And so we went to protest there. And we had a pace table, you know, for doing wallpaper and things, a wallpapering table. Because the news that was being given out about how it's going to make us safer, how cruise is all marvellous was that we would be able to get under a table, you see. That they could give us the early warning to get under the table. So I took all the children, it was 6 children. And we all got under this table. And, you know, made a good picture for the local rag and things. And then a guy came out. And it was, I remember him very clearly don't remember anything about his face, but he had egg on his shirt.

Ew.

So, you know, there's - isn't there some sort of saying about that you've got egg on your tie or whatever? So I thought, oh, well, we're off to a good start here. Poor man. Anyway, he told us all about how we could, you know, be safe once we got under the table. So I just pointed out to him that, you know, I'd got three 18 month old in nappies. And there was no - it was, it was a fiction.

Course, yes.

It wasn't within my reality, and I didn't think it was in, for lots of different reasons in most people's reality either. I don't know what he thought his job was going to be. And so that's how I did get involved there. And then when I moved to Southampton, there was a whole gang of women with children who

wanted to go to Greenham. And we did that. And there were a whole gang of students as well. Because Cruise Watch, Southampton Cruise Watch would come into the kitchen and get sorted out and find out what was going on. And, what spiky things were going to happen. And so - and we were the backup support for anybody who was out doing Cruise Watch.

So you were in Oxford, and that's in Campaign Atom. And then from that you got invited to Greenham or you just decided to go?

Yeah, just decided to go. But there was some kind of speakers going to be there, I think. But then after that I moved to Southampton in 1982 and linked up then with women here. And there were lots of women who are already going to Greenham and staying some time and not staying other times, they've got jobs and or university or whatever they were doing. And I know lots of women as well with small children. So Cruise Watch, had groups in Reading and Stroud, Whitney, Oxford, Southampton, Eastley, Winchester, all the sort of towns dotted around the base.

Yes.

And each group was pretty autonomous. And we all decided what we do. But what we did was keep in touch by CB radio.

Oh my god! Of course, before the days of - I was about to ask you that because the old telephone tree was a thing. But

The telephone tree was used all the time, in the night and all the time. And there were lots of incidents when we were ringing in on the public telephone box.

Yeah.

Other Greenham support women who were, didn't go out to watch the convoys but were - coordinated the information that we were able to gather and get it out to the press and to the House of Commons as quickly as possible. And so when we did that, when we - so we did have to use the public telephones for when we were out.

Yes.

To ring the information in of you know, the the Ordnance Survey coordinates of where we'd found the convoy.

But you had CB radios as well, how cool is that?

Yes, but the car ones were better because they had a better aerial.

Yeah.

And a battery that, you know, you plugged them into the cigarette lighter and - so they could run off that battery, off the car battery. But the handsets, in particular, well, they could all be monitored by the police. And the handsets in particular, were not good to use if you were getting close to the convoy, because they would just come pick you up. So you'd have to go out, into radio silence to get near. And then the other important thing to do when we were ringing in to say where the convoy, when we'd found the convoy where it was, was to erm tell the Greenham camp link woman and someone would get on their bike then and go and tell camp where it was.

Right, okay. So they would collate the information that you gathered back at camp?

They would then act on it. And if they had the opportunity, they would go by car to where the convoy, as near as they could get to the convoy, and then do brilliant actions you see. Because they were, well experienced in all that, and we all got experienced in that. But the main thing was that you couldn't do anything about the convoy if you didn't know where it was.

No, no.

And the political implication was that Michael Heseltine was the Minister for Defence Secretary of Defence at the time, said in the House of Commons that these convoys would melt into the countryside.

Oh.

And oh, gosh, Steve Bell did

The cartoonist?

He did a brilliant cartoon of a convoy covered in snow and melting, a warhead carrier melting into the snow. That was very good. Yeah.

Wonderful. So can you, just to bring it to life for any young women that might not have heard of this before. So, so you'd get the call in the middle of the night on your telephone tree, and then you'd hop in the car and off you go - is that right?

Yeah. Yeah. Could scramble very fast with - from Southampton, probably between three and six cars would just go.

Good grief.

One of our cars was doing the watching anyway, and was already with it. And that was because we'd all meet up then. But yeah. We erm - people from all over would go. And people who were further away, would have - since the convoy was going to be there for a week would have time to organise themselves as well. But we would try to get - because in Southampton, we're quite close. We're sort of quite close to Salisbury as well as to Newbury.

Yeah.

If we weren't actually out, we would try and - well we did get to different points along the route as the convoy came in, but particularly roundabouts.

Right.

We'd have things like this showing.

Excellent. Was that in your car window then?

No, that was a big, a big placard, that would be on a roundabout. So as they come towards a roundabout and slow down, all the drivers, all the police, they would all have to see it. And I remember once a woman did a brilliant thing I thought. It was a big cardboard placard erm just of an eye, a painted eye, just one eye. And it didn't need to say anymore.

Oh, they knew you were watching them!

Exactly. Yeah. The politics of it was that we needed to get it into the public arena. And so the each, the local press, were always interested. Well, to start with anyway, but also, if we got good photographs.

Yeah.

And some photographers came along for the purpose, which was great. And so that was one thing to get it into the media.

Definitely.

Then also into the House of Commons.

So did it get featured in the local newspaper?

Yes, yes, yes.

Were they quite supportive to you and did they print it quite often?

They got bored of course, after a while. So different different things would attract it. But there were some awful, awful incidents of police brutality against women.

Really, is that, um, sort of, did you have that experience yourself? And your group?

Yes.

Gosh, would you I know, it's probably a bit traumatic. Do you want to tell us what happened?

Oh, no, it was erm, just - it was commonplace. So the - you just had to decide whether you wanted, how far you wanted to take that bit of the protest. Because actually, while you're doing all that you're not doing something else that might be more useful. So you had to balance that. So one of the things we would do, we had a mini bus, which we used as a women's mini bus, from Southampton. And we would - when the convoy was coming off Salisbury Plain down these little bridle ways we would endeavour to put the van in the way and stop them. And lots of different things happened all the time. But on one occasion, we were extremely successful. And they couldn't get off the Plain without moving the van. They couldn't move the van because it was full of women all locked in.

Did you use like bicycle locks?

No, no, we were just locked in the vehicle.

Oh, right. Got you.

Yeah, yeah, no, no, we hadn't got onto - well, that was a different kind of action.

Yeah, that was later I suppose.

It was all we did do sort of things that were for specific occasions that we we'd all sort of said we turn up and do it. But Cruise Watch was much more orientated to a task. And it was ongoing. It was one week, every month. And it was 24 hours a day for five days and nights.

Wow.

So it was very task orientated. But yeah, there was one occasion where they, they smashed the windows in the van to get us out. And they tried to actually drag Blue through the door, where the window - well, no, yeah. Because I

think it's the side windows are not the same as - ah well they hadn't used to be - like a windscreen just would shatter and not hurt you.

Yeah.

But the door, windows were kind of more ordinary glass.

That's horrible. Like she could have been really badly injured.

Exactly. So there was blood all over the car. Anyway I didn't quite know what was going on, because I was driving. So they took me out but I decided I didn't want to go through the window. So they smashed the window. And so they put their arm in and opened the window. Anyway. So when they got me out, actually, some of these incidents that have happened with police on top of people.

Yes.

Just reminded me so much what it feels like to be underneath a heavy policeman that you, you can't well, I couldn't do anything, I couldn't move. And so they, they - we all had arresting officers who sat on us or otherwise, you know, kept us out of the way and then they rammed the back of the van back into, you know, just a sort of street, not a street because it's on the Plain but a warnings, you know, like a lamp post, only a sign.

Yeah, I got you.

A road instruction sign.

Yes.

And drove the back of the vehicle in - well, I mean, there were numerous incidents, but these are the kind of things that they would, the extremes they would go to.

Yes, yeah. And that was your van was it Di?

Yes, yes.

Oh, wow.

That was the first van. We then had another van which lasted a bit longer. But that first van is in Bradford Peace Museum.

Is it really? Has it still got blood on the seats?

I don't know about that. Yeah, anyway, um, so that was the sort of thing. But it also meant that women then at camp would know, by being able to give them the, you know, time and location of the departure, they could go check that out. But they could recon on it being stopped a few times en route either by women from the camp coming to meet it or by Cruise Watch. I mean, or just, just local people coming out because they didn't want it in their streets.

No.

The primary school and the golf club and all the rest of it.

Yeah, I'm not you know, I know that you had your core group there in Southampton. But what about the wider community? Were they very much in favour of what you were doing? Or did you you know, what about the the Mums on the school run? What do they say to you? Did you get much support or are they against it?

Funny you should say that because we started a group in Southampton called Families Against the Bomb.

Yes.

And then there was someone called, oh god I forgotten her name. Lady Olga Maitland.

Oh yes rings a bell.

She started a Tory pro-nuclear weapons group called, probably Women for Peace or something like that. I don't think it was as obvious as that but anyway. And then, and that was against Greenham, they purely started that to be an an alternative.

Trying to draw the middle class ladies away from the camp? Because it was attracting a huge, a lot of interest. I mean, every every one because it was the the women's movement as well, wasn't it? So that was a very sneaky trick.

Yes. And the Quakers in particular, were absolutely brilliant.

Yeah.

Very, very supportive. And, you know, coming from just everywhere. Christchurch, and near Bournemouth and all the London women. And at the end of the deployment Manchester, women, you know, would all have time to get there. It just depended on their lifestyles and what they could fit in, really. But it was the same for, same for women who were living at the camp as well.

They had commitments, in terms of court cases, and shopping, and, you know, just like life going on. But mainly the bailiffs and keeping up with their own court cases. And so there was a lot of work done there, as well as surviving in the open.

Yeah I know. It was a tough life.

Yes. But what I think is interesting about Cruise Watch was because after we got rid of cruise - and I sent you that poster.

Yes, it's great!

Because and I think I sent you the timeline of it as well. Once we'd got the treaty, then we knew that that's what was required. You need a treaty to progress legally and internationally and in a structured, democratic way that will stick.

Yeah.

Which of course we had with Gorbachev. That was a key thing. It's, a lot of things came together at the time of Greenham.

Yeah.

And so there was this treaty. So now we've got a situation - I don't know if you've heard about the ICAN treaty? For to - I'll have to send you the link for it. But there's a treaty making nuclear weapons illegal that's been worked on for a long time, and has now been accepted by the UN. And in the UN, they had this year got 50, think it's 50 countries have signed up to a non, to making nuclear weapons illegal. It's a kind of extension, if you like to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Yes.

And that's the same forum as the United Nations and so on. But it's been extremely successful and the dribble of countries now that are still signing in. Of course, we don't expect the nuclear states and there's only, you know, half a dozen or so of them, to sign it. But that's actually what you need. That's what's required is a treaty. What we want to really say now, I think, is that we knew at the end of Greenham that we were had all sorts of means, which were outside previous protests.

Yes.

To reach a situation where Cruise was a failure. In fact, Cruise Watch wrote, a erm - I can't think what it was called. Anyway, a report basically listing all the failures under different headings, failure in a democracy failure, militarily, failure in secrecy and security. You know, every heading they tried to meet goals in they, they failed. And so that's what we need. Now, with getting this treaty that already exists, signed up - it's an opportunity to publicise it and say, we know where we're going. It's not just you know, that we don't like Nuclear Weapons very much and we we want miraculously for them to to be resolved and not have any. We actually know the route. I now I'm now at Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp and have been for many years and Aldermaston is where the British nuclear weapons are developed and built and they go irregularly, but about every two months, sometimes every month or two - anyway, from Burghfield, which is the new twin base with Aldermaston. So, research is done at Aldermaston. At Aldermaston the nuclear component and the high explosive components are all manufactured.

Goodness.

But they're not put together at Aldermaston because Aldermaston is a power keg of Nuclear Risk.

Right.

Horrendous, horrendous, serious place of stored plutonium and goodness knows what. So any kind of disaster there would be unimaginable.

Well, yeah, I mean, that's great that you're, I mean, you're obviously still active now.

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

So your activism has lasted your whole life Di, it's amazing.

As well, there's always something to do you see, if you sit still and think, oh well, we failed, or we didn't do that, or they still got nuclear weapons. And it's it's not true. There's a lot - there's a lot we can do. So at Burghfield, there's a Burghfield watch. And so when the convoy is - Burghfield is the nearby base where these two components under very strict conditions are put together.

Cool.

And it's the most horrendously high risk job in the world. Imagine. So all the countries that have nuclear weapons have this task of in the end, putting the high high explosive into the warhead. So that the two things will work. Yeah. field. So that's where the warheads put together. And from then, this is now this week, last week, anytime they then have to be developed, deployed to the

submarines.

Of course, yeah.

1986. And it's still going.

Oh, do you go and visit there?

Yes, yes. Well it, Aldermaston is not the kind of place where you want to live outside.

Right.

It's too dangerous.

Yeah.

It's too high risk. And so we have a camp and have had a regular camp every month for a long weekend.

Right.

For 20, 30 years or something like that. But now, with all this pandemic business, we're just doing it by zoom. But this year, yes, we shall be back at camp. And what we want to do is for women who are interested in protest now about nuclear weapons about this new proposed warhead that you might have heard of in the news.

Yeah.

And this is a very good time the government have have given us, us on a plate that they want to build, have a bigger stockpile after it's been reduced, and reduced and reduced, because partly because it's been effective to say, well, you don't need all these, you only need one.

Yeah.

Because they're hugely, hugely more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb. So if women want to come to Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp, it's the second weekend of every month, as soon as the - and we stay really from Friday night, till Sunday, in the summer sun. We stay a bit shorter in the winter. But it's, it's a very good focus, we're talking about current nuclear issues with women and watching the base and being a witness to what goes on.

And when you go there, are there women there that you know from back in the day from Greenham or Cruise Watch? Like seeing all your old friends again?

There are. But there are other other women who've come along since which is great.

Did you feel like you made some lifelong friends through the movement? My best friend I went to Greenham with when we were teenagers and we are still best friends now, 40 years on or whatever. It's incredibly bonding, isn't it for women to be together in this - and helping each other out, in a difficult place, like in a dangerous place, and knowing that they've got your back and everything. It's it creates lifelong bonds - doesn't it?

Yes. And it means that if we have differences of opinions about things, erm we know that underlying that is this common strength of working together.

So

it means we can be quite honest and really not have to pussyfoot around. We know that we can say what we're thinking.

Yes.

And then we'll say, Well, now it's your turn. What do you think kind of thing?

Yeah, respecting each other's opinions, even though you might agree to differ.

Yes. Yes. It's just different ways of going about the same thing. Basically.

Can I ask you a bit about the structure of Cruise Watch back in the day? Because it was non-hierarchical - wasn't it?

Yes. Yes.

How did you organise?

By disorganising. Because it was such a flexible, fluid thing to start with anyway, we didn't know which way which road, how we would ever find these vehicles. But as we got used to it, we could predict some of the, there were - they had limited options.

Right.

Started off with just a few police escorting a military convoy out.

Did you have like a meetings then like weekly or monthly meetings where you all

got together?

We had a debrief meeting. But that's all. We didn't have any planning meetings because it was a network. There would be no way of having a complicated - I mean we did have big events which were put out on the phone trees and there were posters and peoples phone numbers. So we did all that as well - but particularly in the summer on Salisbury Plain and then that was great loads of people came to protest. And that was really good. But the actual work of finding out where the convoy was going we wouldn't have been able to do that if we - I mean communications were intercepted. They were doing their job, we were doing ours.

Did you have your phone tapped?

Yes. Yeah.

But could you tell when you picked it up, because it sounded a bit funny?

Oh, well, there were lots of different ways of doing and different things. And I mean, I was in a telephone - I said to you when we have to actually ring in and tell someone who couldn't communicate by CB. And I was giving the location of the where the convoy was moving. This was in Newbury, when it was just setting out. And a big burly policeman came into the phone box, remember red phone boxes?

Yes, yes.

He came in and just put his fingers on the receiver head and cut me off.

Oh!

And he was very big. I couldn't get out of the telephone box until he moved. But you know, just - they were doing barmy things spontaneously just as we were. But there was so much spontaneous erm - because the the golden rules we had golden rules.

Yeah. Will you tell me what they were?

Yes. They were non-negotiable. They were non-violence at every level. So that's verbal non-violence and physical non-violence. Other than that, and to erm, be non-hierarchical and to be erm, pro women.

Yeah. Exactly.

If women wanted to do something they had first go.

And I know you had men in Cruise Watch, that was the difference wasn't it. Did you have any trouble with any of the men? And if so what did you do?

Well, I think in different groups, probably. Because a lot were associated, obviously, with a local peace group, and other local peace group meetings, which would be doing their thing. And anyway, they might arrange to meet separately as a group and arrange things too I don't know. But we none of us knew really what we were going to be doing most of the time.

Yeah.

One of the things that did cross over was something called gloop.

What's that?

Well gloop was something that you wanted to mark the convoy with, to, because, the - when it went back into the base, for example, the USAF will say, well, you know, they, 'Nobody knows where we went,' or 'We didn't do that.' And it was loads of silly things. If the cruise launchers had paint dripping down them,

Yes.

Or some other strange stuff, which we called gloop - which would often be last night's dinner and mixed in with porridge and anything that would stick you know. And then - and so that was certainly done by Cruise Watch groups and also by women's groups who came from camp and as the convoy came, you know, from, you know, 20 miles away from Greenham, they'd suddenly come across a gang of women. And the vehicles will be marked and, on they'd go.

Fantastic. Must have been a wonderful feeling, catching one and blocking it like that.

I mean, it was a bit aggravating, you know, spending hours in police stations, and then court cases and that sort of thing. And a lot of women as you know, went to prison. And so did men for protest against the convoy because we refused to pay the fines because we didn't accept that we were guilty.

Did you have, I mean, what did you - no judgement here Di because you had six children. Did you pay your fines? Or, or did you take the, do time? What did you do?

Um, I did - I went to prison most of the time. I paid the fine in the early days,

perhaps once or twice, but I can't remember doing that. But I think you could, I think you could pay it sort of well I don't know a pound a week or something like that, you know, we would do all sorts of barmy, things that were really aggravating, but mostly I didn't in the end pay fines.

And what was your experience of prison? What was it like?

Um, the hardest thing was meeting other women in for the most ridiculous things - non payment, television licence, all that sort of stuff. Absolutely scandalous. And then there were other women who well, one woman who had yes, I think anyway, I think she had she'd been abused and was used by a man, her partner. And anyway, so she was in prison for manslaughter. And I think well - she was brilliant, actually. So meeting women who were in prison was the most painful thing.

Yeah. Hearing their stories.

Yes.

It's just generalised oppression really isn't it?

Yes. Absolutely. And, and awful things as well. I was in once with an older woman who didn't speak English. I don't know which of the Asian languages was hers, but possibly Urdu depends whereabouts she came from, you know, which community she came from in this country. Because in Holloway, people went to - yeah, you went to Holloway from quite a lot of areas because there aren't a lot of women's prisons.

So you were in Holloway?

Mostly. Yeah, yeah. And so she didn't speak any English. And I didn't speak any Urdu and we were sharing a cell. But we found someone you could - they had tiny, tiny little windows in a narrow windows in Holloway, in the new building, I wasn't in the old building, which was horrendous. But in the modern building, they were just these like these slits. And you could shout out onto the courtyard and manage to locate someone who could translate for her. But it involved enormous lots of shouting up and down the kind of courtyard out through the window and then getting the message back again. But, you know, it was a terrible situation for her to be in.

Yes, yeah.

She'd been set up by some men.

Oh had she? How awful.

As a carrier.

Yeah. And what about your, um, your family? You must your husband, Paul, he picked up the slack while you're inside and looked after the kids?

Yes, he did. And and he repaired the vehicles - in the the front garden we had, because most of the vehicles were, you know, old or certainly not new vehicles. And they had a rough time on Salisbury Plain. And they had a rough time with the civilian police.

Yes.

And the MOD police but the civilian police more so.

Really?

Yeah. So they all needed repairing when we came back after a week. So Paul would do that. Ready for the next, next dispersal.

And did you have like CND symbols on your van or did you go incognito?

Well, none of the vehicles were incognito. We could have symbols on if we wanted and whatever we wanted to do. But we had Cruise Watch stickers I think in the back.

Yeah.

To make sure they, well that was a bit of a protection really because then they knew we were not going to do anything violent.

Yes.

Or stupid.

Yes.

So because the vehicles would go very fast, quite fast the convoys and it was dangerous. In the middle of the night, no street lights and all this.

Speeding along. Anything could have happened.

So that was the other thing about, our driving had to be non-violent. Which means we would not do - we would change our minds and not do something that we'd decided to do if it looked as though it would be dangerous, for whatever reason, weather conditions and all sorts of things.

Were you always the driver then? You must be a very good driver!

And I was mostly yeah. But I did go in other people's vehicles sometimes as well. Yeah. If I didn't have the van, but the van was useful because we could get so many women in.

Wow, I can just see it now, it must have been amazing. So, so you got a call. If it was, you'd have - so it was one week on that you were on duty once a month - is that right?

Um, no, we would do - well, there were two things. That convoy was watched, the base was watched 365 days a year effectively. And to start with, because we didn't know what would happen,

Hmm.

So it was a lot of work just to watch the base. But then after that, they would come out about once a month, but we didn't know when.

Yeah.

And so every night the con, the base still had to be watched. But for example, when they'd just come back from a dispersal, they wouldn't be going out the next week, because like us, they all had to recover.

So you got a bit of downtime?

Sort of, and then then it would all start up again. And there were lots of erm really good sessions when the convoy was returning because it would very often pretty well always go back in through the main gate at Greenham.

Yeah.

And they'd go past The Swan pub roundabout.

Yeah.

And that was a good focus for people to come from lots of different directions who hadn't been out on the Cruise Watch so far, but on the return, because we could give a lot more information about.

You knew for sure that they'd be going past that roundabout within a certain hour?

Yes, pretty well. And if they change, if they change, they got to the point

where they couldn't change it, because they tried every route. And they got into a worse pickle by using kind of, trying to use devious routes or something.

So erm so yeah. And that was very good, because then after they finally cleared the roundabout at The Swan, they then have to go to camp, and it will start up again. Of course, with camp women and, you know, women would climb on the vehicles and ride into the base with them and all sorts of things.

Lying in the road?

But the blockades were, had to be extremely careful because the USAF drivers were very gung ho they were psyched up to take this. These, in that view, you wouldn't be, they wouldn't be able to do their job if they weren't. And it's, to some extent, it's the same as I described with the British nuclear weapons now, where they put the high explosive and the nuclear components together that - psyching someone up to actually do that is a professional job. Yeah, people to do that. And they don't do it very often. One person doesn't do it very often. And so it's just a strange world of nuclear mentality. All comes down to the nuts and bolts of the weapons and the dispersal, planning, the logistics, all these things. That's what it depends on. Things are a bit different now. And that's, of course, why they've got them on submarines. But they still get into awful pickles one way or another. So it's still a high risk strategy.

Like a lot of women got terribly injured didn't they, protesting.

Absolutely.

How about yourself? Did you sustain any physical injuries?

Not seriously. Oh, yes, I did. Once Yes. That was at Aldermaston women's peace camp.

Oh, can you tell us about that? What happened?

Well I don't know why the gates suddenly opened and there were people coming in and out or something. Anyway, so we all jumped up from the camp and went in. And they were shutting the gates at the same time. And this policeman just picked me up and threw me out. Well, I was much lighter than he anticipated, I think because I'm not - and I landed on my head.

Oh, my god.

So I went to hospital then. But I mean, people were quite seriously hurt in lots of circumstances.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Horrendous. Did you have concussion?

I didn't. I think I might have done for a few seconds. But it wasn't that serious. But because, you know, you're very vulnerable when you're living out of doors in a sleeping bag, and you've got to make quick decisions, and you've got to be able to look after yourself. And I didn't, I wasn't in that state. And I didn't want the other women at camp to have to look after me. So anyway, it was all decided, you know, I'd go to the hospital, which was fine. And it was very - I was very impressed. They kept me under the nurse's station all night. To the monitor my, you know, my pulse just kept going down.

Oh, scary. And did you erm. I mean, you didn't have any come? That was a military policeman, I suppose wasn't it? So there was no come back?

It was the MOD police. So there was different, with the er - and the same with the current warhead convoys. There's, first of all, there's the all the people involved in it are armed. There's no question about that. Even the motorcycle outriders have got handguns, because they couldn't manage a big gun. But the convoy is escorted by Marines. And they're, they've, you know, all got machine guns. And then so there's the Marines. There's the military police, when they get onto the site, the red caps, there's the squaddies the - in the end, they had to have UK forces guarding the Americans guarding their vehicles. So there were a lot of a lot of people involved. The civilian police, obviously. And yeah, but they were all all the military. Obviously it works by obeying orders.

Yes.

And so to a certain extent, you could, you know, predict what they would all do. I don't remember any, any of anyone going beyond the brief. So their brief was to stop us.

Yeah.

And I said to a policeman one day, you die for this? Oh, I was to do with Michael Heseltine. This was, you know, in association with a convoy going out. Because we went to, before they put up these big gates and fences at Downing Street. And there was just a little barrier, so we could just leg it over the barrier. And the police, police man grabbed me and was very rough with me. And so I said, 'You'd die for this man, wouldn't you?' And he said, 'Yes.'

Oh, really?

No question. He didn't have to think twice. Yeah.

Yeah.

And the same with the same with a lot of the military. They're trained - the military are trained, obviously, to die. And meeting the young squaddies, you know, in the middle of the night in the middle of the woods on Salisbury Plain. You know, I just, they, they just have to stop us doing whatever we were doing. But they, I think their their orders were not to touch us. But if we ran away, they would run after us and catch us. But if we didn't run away then they would be. And I can remember saying to one 'What would your mother say? Look at you!' And, I mean, they could see the funny side of it as well if there was some, you know, humanity there somewhere. But for a lot of people it is a way of life and they think that well they, they do as they are told. But there were quite a lot of police I think who didn't necessarily support the weapons and the American convoy being out on the British roads.

Oh, yes.

They wouldn't obey anybody really. They would do they want to do.

Yeah. So just to recap what you said then. There's there was some police who didn't agree with American weapons being on British roads, is that what you said?

Yes, but they did their job.

They wouldn't do anything about that. They might just privately think that?

Yes, yes. Because some of them were very often of risk. I mean, I've described you sometimes there being a lot of protesters around a roundabout, yeah, the convoy would be endeavouring to get round of round the roundabout when it was going quite slowly, with without being stopped, or they didn't know what was going to happen. And so the police had to face the protesters, and therefore have their backs on a roundabout going round to the convoy.

Scary.

Yeah. And I had, you know, and other people did as well - we sometimes had to pull the police out of the way.

So they didn't hurt themselves?

So that they wouldn't get caught by the convoy.

So they could have been killed if it wasn't for your humanity?

Yes. Well, we all could. We were all in it together at that point. Yes. There's been no distinction that they would have been run over as well as us.

Ah, scary. Yeah well you're very, very brave. And and it's really brought it to life. Speaking to you, I've got images in my mind if you're the phone going in the middle of the night and you're grabbing your CB plug it into the cigarette lighter. Getting in the van. Did the van have a name or anything or?

Oh, yeah, well, we all had, we all have CB handles.

What was yours?

Bracken.

Okay, Bracken!

When we first started, everybody had herbs, which is lovely. But I didn't - I didn't get into the herbs. And anyway, they were all gone. I couldn't think of a herb by that time and anyway, my car at the time was brown. So I called it, so it was Bracken. But um oh, yes. When the convoy was spotted the CB message by that time we, didn't have to keep radio silence.

Okay.

We got it. We could put it out. And they couldn't do anything about it. It was done.

Yeah.

So there'd be a call come out, 'Calling all herbs, calling all herbs, calling all herbs.' And you'd just start the engine get going and then get the directions where you were going to, once you've set out, you know, got down the road.

Yeah. Well, it's a fantastic example of decentralised organisation being very effective, isn't it?

Yes, yes, it was a good network of people like minded people with the same objective, and with the same commitments to not hurting anybody.

Amazing.

But we have to bring it back up to date, because there are still convoys of British nuclear weapons going up and down A34, the M4, the M40, the M42, the M6 and sometimes up the A1M and then crossing over because they're all aiming to get to Coalport which is the storage base for nuclear weapons in this country in Scotland.

Right.

And Coalport is near Faslane.

Yes.

It's the submarine base for the submariners who go out and take the weapons out to sea and are supposedly prepared then to fire them if they're told to.

Oh, my goodness ey. Well, this is absolutely fascinating. I've got one of, one document from you. But you mentioned something about a timeline. I don't think I got that from you Di.

It was just a brief thing to say about the trea, the the INF Treaty.

Righto. Yeah, whatever you send that I can pass it on for the for the archive, because it's you know.

The Cruise Watch archives, the paper archives and, and, and artefacts as well are going to Bradford, Bradford peace, Bradford University.

Right.

And so all the all the things to do with the INF Treaty that we did, are there now at the Bradford Peace Museum. Yes, but they're, they're, they're - the archives are stored at the moment. And we're still gathering them. And the other thing is that we can't gather them, in except to say, except to put what we want to put into the public arena.

Yeah.

And there's many things that we've got a 50 year rule on from our point of view, which we won't put in the archives anywhere yet.

Oh, that sounds interesting. There's some secret missions that you went on!

Not really. It's just people are still active.

Yeah, of course. Yeah.

So, I mean, it's in many ways, it's a - if the police, you know, check on our records, then they know what they're dealing with. They, they know that erm, we may be uncooperative, we may sit down or refuse to move, they might have to drag us around a road or a police station or somewhere, but we're not going to hurt them.

No.

And we're not going to hurt anybody else.

Exactly. What about that letter that - from the Australians to you? Oh, do you want to tell me about that?

So, um, but I will have a look at it. What was it about?

I think they were coming to visit you or something like that. So I can read a bit of it out. It might refresh the memory. But um, hang on a sec. Yeah. So Nov '89. So back in the day, 'Dear Di MacDonald.' That's you isn't it! A gentleman called Dennis Daugherty and Hannah Middleton, they'll be coming to London December the 10th to January the 10th. And erm, well known writer and speaker of the Australian peace movement. They were coming to visit family, but they were reaching out to you to talk about the peace movement. I don't know if you ever met them or not?

Probably I mean, we had loads of fun visitors.

Well they were based in London so I suppose you'd have had to travel up to London to see them, or maybe did they come to you in Southampton?

Well we might we might have met somewhere else. And at Greenham there was a constant constant stream of visitors from all over the world.

Of course, yeah it was fantastic.

And, you know, some of us have kept in touch for whatever reason. And there are Greenham Women now living, working on nuclear issues in Australia, more to do with mining, uranium mining.

Yeah.

And the same in the States that part of the Greenham Women everywhere, as it came to be called nobody had thought of that term really, it kind of evolved. And I don't know who who coined it really probably London women I should imagine. I don't know. But I don't know what I was going to say about it really.

Well. Another thing I was going to ask you is when you, you, you'd set off in the in the van with your women friends would, would you call that an affinity group? When you all went off in the middle of the night?

Yes.

You would. Yeah. And it would generally be the same people every time?

Yes. And we did a lot of training.

Ah, yeah.

Because, you know, the the automatic response if somebody grabs you is to try and get away.

Yeah.

And erm you didn't stand a chance of doing that. And in any case it was an offence, so you got arrested for trying to get away. So we'd - and law as well. I mean, we did enormous amount of work on law. Defended ourselves in court a lot of the time but also, you know, needed to know

You needed to up-skill really didn't need to be effective as a group.

Absolutely.

Yeah. So would you like to have like an NVDA training sessions and things like that for new members?

Yeah. Yeah. And we would go and do them for new groups wherever they were.

Wonderful. So when you erm - taking, taking it back to the exciting moments that you set off in the van, did you drive around and pick up the girls, then the the students?

No, there was quite an effective telephone tree, and everybody would just arrive at a starting point. And we move around various vehicles and who was going with which vehicle and how many were around. And then just also - the main thing was speed.

Yeah. So you did you all meet in a car park or something, a load of vehicles and pedestrians would get there on their bikes or whatever?

Yeah, lots of people would ride bikes, but other cars that were coming to meet the other cars could pick up on route as well. It was a big mixture.

Wow. So exciting. And did you, you, you mentioned the songs at the beginning of our conversation. So did you, were you all singing along in the van when you went along?

No, not really, that was more a relaxing, enjoyable time. Except if we were singing to the military and the police.

(Singing) We all come from the gardens!

(Both singing) We are witness to your war crimes, and I will remember your face.

And it would just go on and on like that. That's a very good ear!

Oh how lovely, that's so great.

And singing in prison was a big thing too.

Of course.

Because it was something that we could do. And I don't know if it entertained other women, but it was

Kept the spirits up I should think.

For them as well. Yes. Because one one place - when I was in prison with another woman, although we didn't know until we got there that we were there for - I mean, there was so many court cases going on at the same time. And if we went to court in our own towns, and not at Newbury, then we wouldn't meet until we've suddenly found we were all in the same prison. Anyway, there's two of us who refused to pack war toys, which were space, things for invading by space.

I know what you mean guns and things. Yeah.

No, it was actually a spaceship!

Ah!

With guns all around it. Anyway so we wouldn't do that. That was the, that was work that was on offer. And we refused to do it. So we had a terrible time.

And we were put in strip cells and in solitary confinement and

How awful.

But we were both put, they I mean, they just moved us to kind of area where they put difficult people, I suppose. Difficult women. And so we could sing to each other across the corridor.

Great.

We had a good sing for hours and hours because it was we were so incensed for being punished for not packing the toys.

Oh, good for you. I mean, the songs are really so uplifting - aren't they? Oh.

I think the work that you're doing is really great to get it together and gather these archives. But my main message is as you've probably gathered is really to do with now and to do with what we must do now because the announcement of the upgrade of the British nuclear warhead, along with the idea of having a treaty actually going around the UN to get rid of nuclear weapons - which is not just an airy fairy thing, it's an international legal thing, in the same way that you know that there are other international legal things that are adhered to.

Yes.

And so this one can reach - has the same status. But it has to have - it has to be signed by all the countries.

Well, it's been most inspiring, talking to you Di and I mean, I really feel like I've got an insight into that very exciting time.

Strange, strange world. Not much sleep. Lots of stress and - but ending up at Greenham around the fire was great.

With a nice cup of tea and a singsong.

Yes. That was the kind of recovery time, that wasn't what it was about. It was about actually struggling against it in the courts and spreading the word, uncovering - what Cruise Watch was about was uncovering the secrecy.

And letting them know that they'd been seen.

Yes. Well, I'll send you the nuke the current Nuke Watch website and you can see all the photographs and see all the pictures that people are taking all the

time, general public all sorts of people have because they can't stopped doing this because they service the weapons so they have to bring some back from Scotland to Aldermaston. Take them, service - and now they're proposing to have a whole new generation of weapons that they'll be taking to Scotland and we hope they fail.

We do we do indeed.