

**Helen MacRae**

**I did - I brought a box of stuff - of Greenham stuff, but it's in the car, which is miles away - including a jumper that I knitted at the time...**

Oh that's such a shame...

**... with bolt cutters and barbed wire and things on it.**

That's right. Yes. I think...

**But it's in the car.**

Is it quite...

**Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I didn't know if you'd want to see anything.**

Well it's a nice reference.

**So I just put everything that I have, including badges, song sheets, all sorts of stuff. It's in the car which is, but anyway. I sent a lot to props department at the BBC some time ago. But I've still got quite a lot of things.**

What's most significant to you, what has the most sentimental value?

**(Sighs). It's an interesting question, because I haven't got rid of this. So I suppose...**

You kept all of it?

**No, no, no, I got rid of a lot to the BBC props department.**

Right. Yes.

**When I moved back in the '80s, I moved house.**

So you gave it away then?

**Yeah, yeah, yeah, posters and things. Bigger stuff.**

Okay.

**And photographs and T shirts and badges. I don't know, I don't know what's most significant. It's hard to say.**

Well, I guess if you thought it was significant enough to send it, because you thought quite specifically for the props department...

**Oh no, I knew somebody and they wanted certain things that I had for something - I can't even remember what they were making. And she came and looked through it all, and said what she wanted.**

Okay.

**So it's things like t shirts that I'd written on 'Smash the patriarchy', and stuff like that. And but, I haven't got that stuff anymore.**

So it was some T shirts you gave away?

**Yeah, badges.**

Yeah.

**And photographs of women on the - at the Orange gate, at the encampment there.**

Is that where you were - the Orange Gate?

**Well, I was really in London...**

Um hum. But the things you chose to keep, you said you kept the bolt cutters...

**No, no they were always confiscated. I didn't keep bolt cutters. I never got them back! (Laughs).**

Okay.

**They were never returned. You know you got charged with criminal damage, but they didn't give you your bolt cutters back.**

Because I did hear they ran out of - the local stores - ran out of bolt cutters because so many people were buying to replace.

**Well, I lived in North London, we got a grant from the GLC, from the women's committee and we spend a lot of it on bolt cutters.**

Right.

**So we were quite a big group, a big support group um, called Camden Women Against Cruise. Which I co-founded with a friend after we did the encirclement of the base...**

Is that where everyone is holding hands?

**The December one.**

That's one that started by some people in Wales?

**Yeah.**

Is that correct? And you took part in that as a group or as an individual?

**No, I went down with two friends. I went in my friends Volkswagen, and I just fell in love with the place, and the ideology. And when I got back to London where I lived - I was a single parent and I was living in flat in**

Chalk Farm. And I thought, I've got to do something to support these women. They've given everything up to come here, and live in these benders. And what they're doing is absolutely fantastic. At the time, we were being told um, Thatcher Reagan Alliance, we were being told that they would be able to fight a nuclear war in Europe. Um. There wasn't a deterrent these missiles - these were fighting weapons.

Yes, yes.

We were being told this, and I remember getting back from that encirclement, and doing some ironing or something, listening to the radio and thinking I'm writing to the White House. I'm writing to Downing Street. This is ridiculous. And I wrote my letters and I thought, right, I'm going to do something here, because these women at Greenham common are amazing. Um, and they've given up so much to do this. So I went um, it was in the days when there were local women's centres. I lived in the London Borough of Camden, which was known as the Socialist Republic of Camden, at the time. And we had a women's centre in - it's called Kentish Town Women's Centre, which was just around the corner from me. So I went round there and talked to them, and asked if I could use their room as a meeting place. And as I was doing that, I met another woman called Pam Barker, and she said 'Oh, I've just had exactly the same idea', and booked the room for a meeting. Things took off so rapidly - I went home made some posters, well flyers - A5 flyers, went round, literally pasting them on lampposts and walls and fences in the area. Called a meeting. And as we were going around with my little A5 flyers, me and Pam, we kept seeing little notes left by two other women called Fern and Annie, who were saying 'Does anybody in this area want to do something about Greenham?' So we got in touch with them. And we had a meeting, and about 50 women came, and it was one of those moments when you just think the energy of women is so beautiful. We had youngsters, we had elderly people. We had a lady from the Regent's Park Estate, called Ros Walters, come up in a wheelchair with her grandchildren. You know, we had a really interesting turnout of women who were all of one mind - we have to do something, not just to support the women at Greenham, but because at

the time we felt we were literally fighting for peace for our lives. Given that Thatcher and Reagan think that they can use this common land to site these missiles and fight a war with them.

So the threat of war felt very, very real at that time?

It did. The government had published silly little booklets called Protect and Survive. I don't know if you've seen them?

Yes. Yeah.

You know, and we were - it was in the news a lot. There was salt talks, which have failed, CND were there in the background, but not very prominent. But Greenham really brought it to the agenda and educated us, and we didn't know that there were one hundred and three Air Force bases. We didn't know that the British Isles were an aircraft carrier. And that all these weapons, mainly American Air Force bases on us. We didn't know these things. We didn't know there was one in Cornwall. We didn't know where they were. We didn't know even that nuclear waste was being transported on our local railway line. You know, in London there's overground as well as underground, and on the overground line where we lived, and many people had gardens and things backing onto it, nuclear waste was trundling around in the middle of the night. Um. Anyway, we started a group called Camden Women Against Cruise. And it was mainly me and Pam doing the heavy lifting for the group in a way. But we got an amazing kind of cross fertilisation of ideas from women - talent, had we had two photographers who were part of a group who did a lot of photography. Pam had art skills. She did a logo of like cutout dolls all holding hands. That was - dancing on the silos - that iconic photograph of those women holding hands. So she did a circle of cutouts. Like a paper chain. That was our logo. I've had - not skills, I was a single mum and I was working for some people who did PR for publishing companies. So I knew about press releases. And I knew about contacting the media. And um, publicising events. So we all had different skills and different things to bring. And we just worked

**together as a collective so easily. There was no discussion, things just kind of fell into place. Yeah.**

So that was from seeing the initial um, people who went from Wales and did the encirclement, um, tapped into thoughts that you already had, but really helped from then on it was a sort of consciousness, raising time - learning about everything that was going on. And then you with friends, starting your end linking with others, and then it grew. That was in Camden. So where did it - when was that - what which year did that happen?

**Well, the encirclement, I think it was the December of '82. So then, after Christmas, sort of 5 weeks later, in the beginning of '83, we had this group. And it was a group of very powerful women, who were very motivated. A lot of us had children, though, we had the use of the Women's Centre, which had a big room, and a backroom where we could have a crèche - we had meetings every fortnight. We had some really nice men who um, looked after the children in the creche. They were a group called Crèches Against Sexism.**

Okay.

**Particularly nice men. Declan is the one I mainly remember, a lovely man from Ireland um, who wanted to support women during this. Um. We had a newsletter. I mean, this all took off just...**

The energy just took it?

**From nothing it just went. We had this newsletter, um, we got ourselves busy quickly picketing the Ministry of Defence. We did an action on the North London line publicising the nuclear waste transport that nobody knew about. We were up and down to Greenham like yo-yos at the weekend. We found we collected outside the Gandhi film, money for Greenham, you know, anything and everything that we could think of doing. And then, really within 5 months, we were a mighty little group, really. And we got onto the women's committee at the steering**

committee - I can't remember what it was called, I've still got loads of bumph from it - the GLC was run by Ken Livingstone and his deputy Illyd Harrington. And they were a nuclear free zone. Camden was a nuclear free zone. There were many boroughs taking this stance. It didn't mean they could actually do anything, like stopping nuclear waste running through.

It was a declaration of their stand point, really?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So um, we had - none of us really enjoyed going to these steering committees, but we would take it in turns. And I submitted a grant application. We asked for £1800. Because the photography people realised very quickly, there were videos at the time that we'd bought in Helen - Caldicott's video and other ones. And that if we had these videos, we could sort of show them in various places, put events on, but it meant borrowing a television and a VCR. We didn't have resources in those days, you know, where women who didn't even have phones, you know? Anyway, the GLC gave us £1000. They didn't give us the £1800, but that was an incredible amount, you know, as I say we spent a lot of it on bolt cutters, which they didn't seem to mind. I don't know, because in our sort of accounting and thank yous and things we put up, you know...

Bolt cutters?

Yeah, here's the receipt from whatever DIY shops we'd been using. I can't remember exactly. And there was no - it was the only grant we got, but you know the following year we got a bus, we got a double decker bus from the GLC for...

What, on loan?

Yeah, for the day, for Women's Disarmament Day. Yeah. And we took, we decorated the bus, we filled it with women. We went on a tour of our borough. We did a die-in in Camden Town, where we stopped the traffic for 4 minutes. And we had a lovely actress in the group - great

voice. She used her loud hailer. Um, to, I'd contacted TV-am, which was new at the time. It was just round the corner. So we had a lot of coverage for our die-in. We were inspired by things like the die-in at the Stock Exchange, which had already happened, you know, and I think there were coordinated die-ins all over the country. So the GLC gave us that lovely red, big double decker bus and a driver. And we went around in London all day, doing various things. Um. We used to support the women at Holloway as well. Outside, singing. All sorts of creativity came out of - I suppose meeting like minded souls, and there were so many. There was the Babies Against the Bomb campaign. The - have you heard of the ECP?

No.

The English Collective of Prostitutes from Kings Cross. Whores Against Wars - they were fantastic women. Oh, they were so brave. Yeah, Whores Against Wars - they were so full on. It was like the main one there was a lady called Giselle, that was her professional name. And um, they supported everything. They would also turn up with us. And they had the best tents at Greenham, because we were not in benders, we were overnight people, but they had the best tents. We have the best fun with them. They were great, great women.

Amazing.

Yeah, terrific. We had Pensioners for Peace. We had this lady who turned up in a wheelchair. And then we had another one called Jo Page who started Pensioners for Peace. We made alliances with a lot of groups, a lot of women. We also made alliances with the um ex - what were they called now? Ex-Servicemen for Peace, there was a movement of ex servicemen. I think they might have just been called Ex-Services for Peace, or something - or for disarmament.

Yeah.



They made a donation to us. We had - one morning, we had about three coaches going to Greenham - I can't remember, I think it was children's May Day picnic that we were taking with our kids. We got very good at hiring coaches and meeting down at Euston, and gathering women from all over the borough. Anyway, this particular day, somebody came over from the church and knocked on my door early in the morning and said that they'd like us - they'd heard that we were going off to Greenham, and could we take some cakes for the women at Greenham? And I said 'Yeah, that'd be lovely.' And I'll never forget it, because she'd sort of beckoned me round, and said 'Well come round dear,' and there's this little car with tins and tins and tins of cakes. And I was thinking well, I can't get them there. I'm taking my son, I've got to get on a tube and go to Euston, and anyway, so she gave me a lift, and we loaded the cakes. That was the church. And so we then made an alliance through them to some Quaker women up at Molesworth peace camp. And then we got onto the Peace Tax campaign, where we had these um, you know, have you heard of the Peace Tax campaign?

Yes.

So we had those chequebooks, which I've got one in the car! So when you paid your electricity, you withheld a percentage. I think it was 10%. Yeah. So I'd sent off a cheque, because it was London Electricity in those days - it hadn't all been bought by - it was the LEB, the old LEB. Sent off my cheque, with my standard covering letter - 'I'm withholding this portion because of nuclear energy.' Um. So yeah, you know, it was a time when so many things were flourishing, so many movements, so many grassroots.

It sounds as if there was a tremendous lack of ego with these groups - they were more about connecting and becoming you know, a loosely affiliated collective, rather than maybe wanting the glory for themselves? Sounds like a very different era to now.

It was completely non hierarchical. You gave what you could, and it wasn't judgmental - if somebody only turned up once and then never

came back, it didn't matter. She was a sister. It was not important who was doing what, what was so good was that everybody could feel part of it. There was a real sense of sisterhood, and you know in the early days. I can remember one eviction, I was at Greenham for an eviction. I think my mum must have had my son, I can't remember. But anyway, I was - I'd been staying there, because I was working as well, so I could only do like long weekends and then I was working part time, but I still had to sort of juggle things. After this eviction, and they're quite traumatic because your, your bender for the women who lived there full time - that was their home, and it was literally smashed and bulldozed out of the way. So it was kind of quite well, it's expected because Newbury Council would obviously serve notices on them. So they would expect bailiffs and eviction and so, but anyway, after this eviction, and I can remember this very quiet mood where women simply kind of relocated, found another spot more in the woods, more away from the gate, and just started to rebuild their homes. And what really struck me was nobody was telling anyone what to do. Women, were just seamlessly kind of working together, and very creative - to create homes for each other before night. And I just remember this sense that I had at the time of I've never seen this before. I didn't know the world could be like this. There's no rules. But there are...

It's like a shared...

Yeah.

A shared unwritten rule.

Yeah. And it, it - I just didn't know things could actually happen like that.

Mm hmm.

It was tribal. It was collective. It was non-hierarchical, as you say. And I remember thinking god, if this was a gang of men, they'd be barking orders at each other or...

It's interesting you say that, because you mentioned earlier the men that came together to run the creche, to free the women up to do their bit. So I mean, in the beginning men were involved in Greenham, and then they were pretty much banned weren't they. How did you feel about that?

**Well, that was at - the bannings came later. I mean, they were kind of, yeah, how did I feel about it? I was perplexed. Um. What I felt badly about was towards the end of the Greenham, there was a whole kind of separatist movement - well women started calling, the fringe movements came in, and women started at Greenham calling the police pigs and shouting out them, and I thought oh no, because we'd had soft power before.**

Yes, yeah.

**You know, it was soft power. Um. I remember one blockade where they were building sewers, I think - or they were bringing in building equipment onto the base to build stuff . And I can remember these big lorries with huge pipes, which I think were - anyway, there were like, as usual masses of women lying down, hordes of women just lying down, and there were police there, and I was fairly on the edge of it. And I was lying down, and there was a copper on a bike very close to my head and he was revving it up. (Makes revving noise). And there was fumes and real noise, and the engine is banging off in your ears. And I can remember this very little thin wrist came up, this little hand came up, and the key in those days was fairly down near - it wasn't up on top of the tank as it is now on the motorbike, it was lower down, and this thin little hand came up, turned it off and flung the key in the bushes. And he's there impotent.**

(Laughs)

**That, to me is this soft power.**

Yes.

**That was, you know, we were thinking outside the box now.**

Yes, yeah.

**Yeah. And when the sort of elements came in - the lesbian separatist element, and started being disapproving of women who had penetrative sex with men, because all men were rapists, you know, I was very perplexed about that. Especially having a son. Who was toying around - he was only young, 3 or 4. He was up a sapling or something in the woods and he broke it. He didn't care. And he went around sort of whipping trees and things with his branch, and the disapproval, the criticism, and I was made to feel bad for bringing a boy child to this sacred space, and I just thought okay, you've lost it, because that sisterhood of all women of all ages, all classes, the Whores Against Wars, all of that, you know, now you're behaving like the people in church, you're laying down these moral parameters - I know we want to smash the patriarchy, that is fine. But at that stage, I just thought god something's really been lost.**

It sounds as if that with, with that movement coming in, it shifted the focus from women who were focusing on, on the cruise missiles, the men that were doing that, what was going on in the camps, to suddenly having to start questioning their own er, belief, ways of living, sexual preferences. And it sounds as if the focus shift did.

**Yeah, it did. Oh, it did. But it took a while. We you know, had a really good sort of glorious year really, I felt - before the focus went. There was a Halloween event where I felt things shifted.**

Okay, tell me about that.

**Well, I felt it, I don't know, it was just my impression. We had this Halloween event and people were dressing up - that was fine. I loved the pagan goddess element at Greenham. Um, I'd absolutely loved that, and that women would instead of saying 'Oh my god', would say 'Oh my**

goddess.' I loved that. And I loved - because I always believed in some sort of great spirit. I wouldn't have a Christian faith or a this faith, or that faith in particular, but I'd always had this spiritual sense, although I often doubted it as a teenager. But anyway, Greenham had that lovely, we all belong to the Goddess, there are laws of nature, women keep laws of nature, there was this feeling of being in touch with those rhythms. Then the witchy element came in, like this idea that - of woman as the sorceress, the sort of Hecate, powerful dark goddess side I suppose. And this in, it got, it inflamed some women I think, who liked the idea of spell craft and hexing, and I' felt it's great to be in touch with women's mysteries. But there was a sort of point - I remember being outside Holloway prison where a woman - this is after the Halloween thing - where a woman turned up with a green face and a witchy hand, she was keening outside Holloway, and I was thinking, oh god, you're gonna discredit all of us. Just fuck off. You've clearly got big issues of your own, just clear off, because this is what the media want to see.

To undermine and discredit?

Yeah, and I felt she had this massive ego - 'Look at me I'm this witch, I'm gonna support the women in Holloway by howling', and because they did do you know keening, and making that ululating noise at Greenham. No problem with any of that, loved all that. And the songs, I liked the in touch with nature, the goddess bit - loved it, but when it, and I even could take a bit of witchcraft, you know accept a bit - if that's what women want to do. It's not for me, spells and magic have never interested me, but I don't want to be judgmental about it. But I felt that there was, for me, a bit of a turning point then. It was - became like we can curse these men. You know, we can hex Reagan in the White House. We can hex these policemen, and actually, you know, some of the men on the base, some of the GIs on the base, young, poor, black guys, from the South - future is in the army. They weren't really the enemy. They were part of the whole patriarchal system, you know, in a way. Women hadn't been abusive, and called the police pigs and things. They'd been that softer. I mean, they weren't pushovers by any means. I'm not saying that - none of the women were pushovers. But the

integrity I felt was going a bit - that sounds pompous. But that's how I felt. You know? Um. Anyway, I mean in Camden our group had a fantastic time - we had a great we a 1st birthday party. We hired the Drill Hall in Chenies Street. We had an amazing, we had, it was a benefit. We had this massive party. There was loads of booze. There was loads of great records. Um. We had absolutely, really red hot woman DJ - we danced, and, you know, all of that were that - you can have a great time without men. We knew that anyway. Yes, you know, it was like, my one of my neighbours who's my babysitter, this lady Eve Mills, 75 - she was there on her fourth Guinness, and it was like, we were really together.

Yes.

It hadn't fragmented. But it did fragment, the focus was lost. And we eventually had a meeting about it. And we decided to call - to take away the against cruise, CWAC - Camden Women Against Cruise, and to become Camden Greenham Women. So we eventually decided to do that. And try, because it also lost focus in different ways. It wasn't just hating men. And there were men haters there. It was, um, there were a lot of other struggles going on at the time. There was starting to be much more awareness of disability, and how that impacts on people having quality of life. There was incest survivors, sexual violence against women, solidarity with the refuge movement. There was Eritrea - the war there, the hungry people of Africa. There was um, black women's rights, women of colour, which used to be the phrase. Struggles, there's Black Sisters who - and and there were many campaigns for women who were on the verge of being deported. We had a lady in our group called Malika - she and her daughter were on the verge of being deported. They'd been fighting it and fighting it. So we were being asked to support many other causes, because those, like the black women's struggles were a daily struggle for survival. And they were saying to us 'But you're just struggling against that, you've got it all made for you, you know, this is your world as women, but we're struggling for survival on a daily basis. So you should support us.'

So it was almost seen as a luxury to be able to go and get together?

**It was seen as like, you don't know how entitled, and how lucky you are, where we are doing what you're doing on a daily basis. And I mean, we were asked to support a lot of other things, and then that with came sort of admin, and demand to do things. And I remember - because I had a type writer, I had an electric typewriter, and I'd been doing the press releases. I said 'But do you know what, I haven't been to Greenham for about 3 months now. I've just been struggling with all this shit, all this paperwork, all these other people, and they're stealing all our energy. And it's not what it was.' And I do remember feeling that.**

Yeah, yeah.

**And that was a - yeah. Things dissipated.**

Yeah.

I mean it does the, the energy and the different types of energy, and where the energy came from sounds very um, key to what you're saying. And when you were talking about rebuilding the benders, the rebuilding the houses, it was almost this energy to do that was kind of was greater than each individual - it sort of um, connected and that the energies were directed in a particular - at you, at a particular focus, which was Thatcher and Reagan's pact, and focused on, on Greenham, and then other elements came in and the, and their energies were different.

**Oh yes.**

Their energies were different - perhaps more aggressive?

**Yeah.**

Or, or you know, slightly, almost more a cult.

**Edgy. We would do things like invade the Ministry of Defence, and um, not cause serious harm. I do you remember - I have to say I do remember throwing paint at Michael Heseltine who was the minister of defence, in a yoghurt pot. I do remember that - thinking I'm not getting my jacket wet. But we were nonviolent.**

Mm hmm.

**It was called NVDA: non-violent direct action.**

Yes.

**But, I do remember that paint throwing, which I thoroughly enjoyed and then thinking, I don't really know if I should have done that, actually.**

You actually hit him with it?

**No, no, no, just landed on - he was miles surrounded by coppers.**

But was that when the, the non-direct action, was that when they were trying to gum up the courts by...

**Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well - gum them up, how do you mean?**

By the protest so that you know, doing enough to get, to be troublesome.

**Yes. Yeah.**

Get taken to court.

**Yes.**

They hadn't done anything violent, but they'd done enough to get taken to court, which meant the courts were going to put their energy into...



Were being arrested for breach of the peace, obstruction, criminal damage. You know, where you've done so much damage to this fence.

Yes.

And there was one woman who'd spray painted - she'd seen this row of planes - I think she was called Rebecca, but I might be imagining that now. But I can see her - this blonde English rose, young woman, she'd gone down the line of planes - of aeroplanes with her spray can, and painted hearts and flowers all over this plane. And she'd caused over a million quid's worth of damage to it. She said, you know - people said 'Why did you do that one, you know? Because you'll never pay that back. You'll go down for a long time.' And she said 'Oh, I did that one because it looked expensive.' And it was the Black Bird.

Oh, was it?

Spy plane, that had a skin on it that would defy radar.

Yeah, yeah.

But she'd ruined the skin on it.

Wow!

So, the courts were another thing all together. There was a lot of humour. Yeah, there was a wonderful woman - tall, I can see her now. Tall, very middle class, very strident, and as far as she was concerned, her name was Frida People - she'd changed it. She was always in court, you know, because she just wanted the usher to say 'Frida People, court nine, now.' There was humour. There were women who went and sang their evidence, a cappella style. Or, you know, when they were giving evidence they, they did things like singing it. We also tried to take the government to court actually, there were solicitors who gave legal advice on international law. And there was a quite a serious sort of, I can't describe what it was exactly, but of quite a serious school of

thought that what the government were doing was illegal to plan for this sort of winnable nuclear war. In terms of breaching the peace, we were keeping it - none of us was breaching it with... So there was also lots of solicitors who gave their time to help the women at Greenham. Because you could be locked up in Slough police station with only water to drink for 7 hours, before you got processed.

Did you ever get charged?

Yeah.

What were you charged with?

**Criminal damage to the fence, and obstruction.**

Yeah. And what was the outcome of?

Well, bizarre - there was so much, both charges went nowhere. I got as far as the magistrates court. The obstruction charge - I never heard anything about it again. I got - I remember being let out in the middle of the night, which was mean. But there was a supporter waiting for me. The thing about, you know, this woman called Anya was waiting. There was criminal damage got dropped. And so I didn't even get a criminal record. But I would have been more than - I wasn't - I got arrested twice, the first time I was frightened. The second time I was fine with it. But nothing, I didn't have any penalties. And I was quite surprised because I thought the obstruction one - I thought I'd accepted a caution. In fact, I don't know if I did or not. But I later trained to be a social worker, and I've had numerous police checks, and nothing's shown up. But I thought I'd had a caution for that. But I can't honestly say whether I had or not.

I guess then in those days they... (inaudible) record system as well, so...

Well, I don't know but the criminal damage one never went further, because there was a lot of chaos in the courts. And there were mass

arrests. You know, they were doing one hundred and eighty women at a time. And one action that we went up to from Camden was taking the fence down, we had five coach loads of women, there were a lot of us. We were a strong group. We went up from Euston. And it was jolly, it felt pretty good day out! (Laughs). It was exciting. And defying the patriarchy, and it was jolly - if that makes sense.

You had a purpose - a jolly purpose?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Yeah.

And it did change women. A lot of women - I mean I certainly grew from it. A lot of women grew enormously. And did things - you know when it was all over, and it did fragment and it dissipated away. I've kept in touch with a lot of people. I'm still in touch with Pam the woman that - my sort of co-founder of council Women Against Cruise, she's in Ramsgate now. Cam.. well, Pam put on exhibitions all over Camden in community centres. She got boards and things, with some of the money that we didn't spend on bolt cutters. Um (laughs), so she was really organised and artistic, and she staged exhibitions. Her collection of Greenham memorabilia went to the Women's Library in the East End, and I think they then lodged it at the British Library but I'm not entirely sure. Um, Pam, well other people you know they left their marriages, they moved on, or they did the work that they really wanted to do. It was very liberating, intensely liberating for women in many, many ways. Partaking in that and experiencing that wonderful collective - such a funny energy to describe, it's so peaceful. And so energising as well, you know.

Yes, yeah.

That you could do things that you might not have done - like gone and laying down in the middle of the road.

It almost sounds as if it felt safe to do something that might be seen as unsafe?

**Yeah, I think it did. It was encouraging - the original Greenham women were such phenomenal role models. Impressive women, powerful women. And that was contagious, I think.**

Sounds like it was a very positive energy. To - I mean, the, as you said the change where you had the really anti-men, women coming in, I mean, do you think that overall helped with the energy or, or not?

**Oh, no, it didn't help with the energy.**

No. Right.

**Because it took away the focus.**

Yes.

**It took away, and it was divisive. You know, no more nice Earth Mums. No more nice Whores Against Wars. These were bad women who'd liaised with the enemy sort of thing.**

Right.

**You know, it got really silly at that stage. Not silly - that's not the word to describe it, but it alienated ordinary women. It alienated younger women as well, who were interested in men, or wanted children. I mean, it's a fine - it was a tipping point, I think, wasn't it, realising how damaging patriarchal values were to women, to becoming so alienated from them, that the bitterness and the hatred would then extend to other women. That's when things go extreme, and they lose the heart and soul. They might have the ideology, but it's taken, it sort of cuts through the heart like a like a knife - it damaged the - it certainly made me question a lot. It wasn't all bad being challenged like that, you know, I'm not saying that was all bad but, and I met some very interesting**

women. I met some very nice gay women who were not extremists, who were basically just very pro-women, and a bit anti-men. But the extremist lot seemed to be women that we didn't really have in the Camden Women Against Cruise. It was more when we went up to Greenham and encountered attitudes.

So you encountered those at the camp.

That's kind of my memory, actually. Occasionally in London, but my - at the Drill Hall in Chenies Street, which was a big hangout for left wing sort of women who wanted - but yeah, that's sort of my memory.

Yes, yeah.

But you know, it was no bad thing that - I mean, certainly really questioned an awful lot about how the world worked. I then went to LSE and studied social policy as a result of Greenham, because I thought this is all just so interesting how our economy is based on arms. Well, I didn't know that. This hidden economy, this hidden manufacturing. So when I buy a packet of biscuits, I'm still supporting the arms trade. Everything is so intertwined. I didn't know things like that. You know, it's, so I thought I'm gonna have to do something (laughs). So I went and studied social policy for a year at LSE, and then I left London and I trained to be a social worker in Coventry. I lived at Warwick University, and I went straight into child protection, because that's where I saw the violence and the abuse to women. I was aware of the refuges, so I supported the local refuge, and that's where it took me in that direction. And the basic misogyny of our society, sort of really became writ large to me. And then I could actually see it in the child protection system. How, anti-mother it was, and how mother blaming it was very often. And the whole thing was, I wrote a dissertation about it. So that's where I took my energy, and I'm not sure if we hadn't had such challenging women whether I'd have got there or not, I don't know.

So they had an important role to play but it did cut - as you said, it almost shifted the focus from the original.

**Yes, it subtly did shift the focus, and then blatantly - at first it was subtle, but then it was blatant you know, and then I mean all good things come to an end.**

Yes. Yes.

**But I think they had a role and without them I don't know if I'd have seen as much as I did.**

They gave - and once you've see it, you can't un-see it?

**Exactly.**

It opens your eyes forever, really. I think that consciousness raising and, and that against the backdrop of Thatcherism - which was our first female prime minister, ironically. So, right...

**But also been we had an eye opener (laughs), in our group, you know, we had this lovely trust and our home was in the Kentish Town Women's Centre - it was all, it was fabulous. And one time we were planning an action. It was the time when they used the mirrors to reflect the base.**

Um hum.

**I think we were planning that action. I can't remember, but we'd advertise this planning. We, you know, we had these telephone trees, these ways of communicating with people as well. Anyway we're having a big, a bigger meeting - we usually had 25 to 50 women at our meetings, they were well attended, but this time, we had a 26' long room in this place - it was rammed. And this woman came in very well dressed, very beautiful woman. She looked um, wealthy. And lovely blonde hair. I remember her leather jacket and she asked if she could join, and we welcomed her warmly. Well she was a journalist, we didn't know that - she was from the Daily Express. And she wrote the most**

revolting article, and there was a big cartoon as well about this burly lesbian boiler suited women. But she distorted everything. The article was full of lies and blatant distortions. So I wrote back to the Express and 'Bet you don't publish this.'

Your reply?

Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, the small cold room.

Yes.

With the fourteen burly lesbians. It's a very large room, well lit, well, heated, and one poor man came through to the creche - well, Declan and his mates were already in the creche. You know, and there was a large comer, but you know, but it was the distortions and the lies. But the editor was called Larry Lamb, and I wanted him to see that this woman had been welcomed, and had then trivialised something that was almost sacred. Because none of them were doing anything to raise consciousness about this. So she'd mocked something that was kind of pure.

Yes.

**And what does a hard bitten journalists get out of doing that?**

The byline - her name in print.

Yeah, yeah. So anyway, I enjoyed that, you know.

Did they publish your...

**No, but they wrote back. They wrote back a creepy crawly letter.**

But I guess they'd already published the story and, yeah.

**And the cartoon, but that was a bit of an eye opener that women could**

**betray. It felt like a betrayal, because if you wanted to mock, the material was all there. Yes, we were earnest. Yeah, we were woolly hatted - it's cold at Greenham. This woolly-minded thing. Oh there were no woolly hats, you know? Yeah, we have boots - it's muddy. And you know if you're going to cut the fence, you know, the wires are up here, they're not down here. So you have to stand on the back of another woman. How we did it was a woman would get down like that, and you would climb up on her back. I was small and light. And then you had to snip 1,2,3,4 wires quickly. And then unravel it. That's how we cut it, it wasn't down here.**

Yeah, they were high up. So you, so you literally were standing on another woman's...

**On her back.**

Whereas the journalist was just treading on you for their own game.

**To get a laugh.**

Yeah.

**And they apologised for the lampoon in the crawly letter back, but you know. But the thing was that I was, I mean, that was just a small thing really. But you know, was very aware of how the media saw the Greenham women. So when there was the green faced witch outside Holloway, just thought that was (makes snoring sound).**

That was exactly what they wanted. Yeah.

**And so on.**

So they found it very much a threat?



**I think it was a threat because women were leaving home to go and do this, women, you know, like me, had stopped doing their ironing and was writing to the White House, and saying 'If you're...', because we got the you know, in London there was in a bunker, a nuclear bunker down near Regent's Park. Hampstead Heath was set aside as a burial ground. You know, there were plans...**

**For the eventuality of a nuclear war?**

**Yes, yes. There were plans, you know, laid out at the time. The survivable nuclear war that Reagan and his libido, and Thatcher, this madness, you know. So I suppose, people standing up and exposing it, and doing things that were a little bit anarchic, like halting the traffic - that possibly was a threat. And women didn't - weren't really supposed to behave like that. If you're a feminist, you're meant (adopts posh voice), to write and produce great intellectual works. So, you know like Simone de Beauvoir - meant to be cultivated, not go and camp at Greenham. And I've got to say the organisation that went behind Greenham was phenomenal. The place was hygienic. You know, they knew what they were doing.**

**Yeah.**

**To just set up in our climate with sticks, plastic sheeting, bits of cloth, you know, proper latrines were dug - they called them the shit pits. And as they filled up, they when it got to the surface with earth - a great source of methane, build a bonfire, yeah, sterile. They knew what they were doing. But it was organised in a way without being a hierarchy, as you were saying.**

**Yeah. Yeah.**

**And the organisation between groups like ours, and the communication - given we didn't have internet and instant stuff.**

**That's right.**

**We had telephone trees.**

Yes.

**We could get a message, you know, from Greenham to all across North London to South London in probably half an hour or something, because all these groups had telephone trees to communicate with their members.**

And you moved around different gates, did you?

**No, I stayed mainly with the Orange, because that was the nicest one for children. And I kind of got fond of it. But yeah, we did kind of move around different gates, but that was the main one that I remember.**

Yeah. And did you connect with any people from the other gates in particular?

**I do you remember some women who were doing Faslane, some Scottish women, that we met who were very impressive. And we all reunited, we all met up with them again at Molesworth. But I don't - and then some of us came down to St. Mawgan. There are about four of us in the mist thinking what the fuck are we doing here? (Laughs). Oh, let's just leave some symbols in stones and then go - this is miserable. There's nobody else here! (Laughs). So we did some peace symbols with stones, and went! (Laughs). But, yeah, I don't know. But there were you know, there were groups all over London doing pretty similar things.**