

Mary Woodvine

So when were you at Greenham?

I was thinking about this, I think I must have been 16 or 17, which would have made it (counts to self)... about '84/'85, I think. And it's all around the time of Greenham and the miners' strike and there was lots of politically that was going on at that time. And my dad's girlfriend was a member of the Labour Party and was very active. My dad was a member of the Labour Party, too. But he wasn't quite as active as she was. She was very active. So she, she was going all the time. So then me and my sister went, but my sister was much more political than I was. So if I was 16/17... 18...19, yeah, my sister was about 20. So she was at Poly in Newcastle, but she'd come back and go to Greenham, and loads of her mates were there, and we knew lots of people - women that were there, that like took their kids and just lived there with their kids.

And how long were you there for?

I think I only went for a day. I never stayed. My sister stayed. I'll get you her number as well. Um. I only ever went - I think there was - I think there must have been like a big thing going on, there was an Embrace the Base, and I went to that - where everybody held hands, literally and embraced, you know, did the whole perimeter of the, of the base. And I remember that, and I remember sort of sitting by fires and being near, you know, groups of women and yeah, I'd sort of remember bits of it, but not huge amounts of it.

What's your sort of main memory, would you say?

Um, I think I was really scared on my way there, because I think that everything scared me when I was young. And we did grow up with the Cold War, and this - the fear of have sort of a nuclear threat was, it was very real. It was very frightening. And I've always had quite a vivid

imagination. So I think I was quite frightened. It sort of did occupy my, my mind sometimes. And so, I was kind of quite scared to go, and a bit fearful of what might happen - whether there was going to be trouble or, you know, but actually, it was just, of-course, it wasn't frightening when I got there, because nobody was frightening. It was just brilliant. There was a real sense of, of belonging, and all being there together for one very good reason.

Have you got any sort of memories of how the the day to day running of the camp was? Or what you can remember of...

No, no, no, because I wasn't, I didn't, I didn't stay there overnight or anything. I literally went for one day. And I sort of don't remember much of that, but no. But I do, you know, I had lots of friends that were there and living there, and had - they didn't have their children there. But they took their children as small, really small little breastfeeding babies, and stuff like that, that were staying there for months on end. Yeah, yeah.

Wow. And why do you think, um, so obviously the Suffrage movement is really well known, and I mean, for instance, I had never heard of the Greenham and Greenham women. Why do you think that might be?

(Sighs). I don't know. Time, I suppose. And, I suppose, I mean, there may be some people that, that know about it, because it's been part of something that's been talked about. It's, it's been a conversation that's carried on, but it was a very long time ago. And I think, you know, in the same way that lots of people didn't know that you know that there was a huge Suffrage movement.

Yeah.

You know, and just because that was 100 years ago, for some people 30 - however, 37 years ago feels as long as 100 years ago, and those conversations stopped, I suppose. But it was, you know, it was a massive, massive movement - and it was always on the news, it was

always on the news if they penetrate - you know if they'd get through, or break in, or dance on the silo or get - you know, it's amazing it was happening there - you'd always see it on the news. It's interesting, isn't it, there seems to be less now in terms of - I don't know, it does feel like that there's a lot less sort of direct action unless it's kind of from the right wing. You know, it does feel like - we all march, which is great, but there doesn't appear to be - doesn't feel like there's as much direct action. Maybe there is and we just don't hear about it. Don't know.

How do you, how do you feel like the media did portray it - from your memories of being around, hearing on the news?

Um, pretty negatively as far as I remember. That these were dangerous women who were breaking the law, and leaving their children, and you know, weren't kind of, in inverted commas, real women. You know, not with sort of without - maternal values and you know, because leaving their children behind in order to do this thing. But you could say that they were there because of their children, and their children's future and that's why it was important to be there. But it was pretty negative as far as I remember - all the publicity.

And your relationship with - I mean, obviously you were just there for the one day - did you meet anybody? Do you have any memories of conversations you had, or things that you perhaps saw?

No, but my sister, because she was there quite a lot. I mean, I know - I remember one of the songs which I can sing you.

Yeah!

I remember the songs, and it was very - it felt like it was very present, I did - it wasn't like I'd go for the day and that was the only experience I had of it. It's like, there were conversations. My dad's girlfriend was there a lot. I felt like I knew, I knew lots of people that were there a lot of the time, even though I hadn't gone very much. Um. So I did sort of strangely feel like kind of, I don't know, I was very proud that I'd been -

even though, because I think I was quite - I felt like I was quite young, really. Obviously there were other people, and because my, like I said, my, my family weren't that political. My mum wasn't, my dad wasn't, but it was my dad's girlfriend, that sort of - that was, that it was quite, yeah. So I did - It did feel something that you could feel part of, it wasn't anything that you felt you had to be extreme, or part of a proper rad fem kind of thing. It did feel it was very accessible.

Yeah.

Shall I sing you the song?

Yes, please do!

(Sings). 'Old and strong. She goes on, and on and on. You can't kill the spirit. She is like a mountain.' And it just went on and on like that, just literally repeated like that.

I suppose that the main kind of point for me is obviously it's a women only camp.

Yeah.

How do you think that decision - how was that decision made? And what do you think um, had that - what impact did that have on the camp?

I think, obviously going to be a completely different, completely different idea, atmosphere in an all women camp than there would have been if there had been men. Because I just think there would have been, and then you're, you know, but like in everything you'd get the practical women that were doing all the really practical things, and I would hope, I would imagine that the communication was pretty good. But you know, you're always going to get people that are, that are natural leaders or people that are bossy and get on the wrong side of people, but I can imagine it, I mean, a very, very different idea that it was, it was an all

women thing. And then of-course, that gave other people, you know, men and other people - to give beef about the fact that, you know, it was only women, and that it was sort of separatist, and wasn't allowing men inside. Um. You know, but then I suppose with all the supportive families, there were men at home, that will looking after children of women that were there, or indeed other women as well. But I think it's, you know, it was exciting, you know, looking back, it's it you know, people were fucking doing something.

Yeah.

And following their convictions and having the courage of their conviction to just do that thing, and be outrageous and be - and not play by the rules.

Yeah.

I'm sorry go on - that was it.

I just wanted to ask how long was your dad's girlfriend there for, do you know?

She came and went. I don't think she stayed. She never stayed for very, very long, but she was going there over a period of months. I think 'cause she was working, so I don't think she was able to be there all the time. She was an actress too. So we never say no to work! (Laughs). Doesn't matter what the global situation is - you've got a job, that's it, you put it on hold.

And from your, from your one day there and sort of being involved in that way, I mean, did that sort of inspire you to continue being active and sort of...politics?

Yeah, I, yes, it did. You know, and it was interesting because I definitely sort of followed in my sister's footsteps, and she was the one that was quite extreme, you know, she had a shaved head, and she'd gone off to

Polytechnic in Newcastle, and she used to make these ceramics that she was hugely influenced by, and by the whole feminist sort of women's movement. She used to underneath all of her pots, rather than write her name, she'd do the symbol that was the feminist, the female women's symbol, with two other moons on either side of it. So two full moons and inside, but it made two crescents on either side, there was crescents. So so she was like massively into the whole feminist movement, and then her pots would also be images of women outside the - outside a fence t Greenham and stuff. So she was quite extreme. And I really had always looked up to my sister. So I kind of followed that. Um. And so if I went to visit her, I'd get on the coach and I used to buy, it was the days when everybody smoked, and everybody smoked on couches. So I'd have a packet of Silk Cut and, and some - 4 beers. And I'd read Spare Rib, which was the radical feminist publication as well. So I'd sort of sit and read that on the couch, and I had hair down to my bum. So like my sister had her head shaved, and I had this hair that was right down to my bum, sort of, and then I thought, oh, dear, am I not fitting in? You know, there was that worry that you know, you think oh, god, I'm going to be judged, or I'm not going to fit in because I don't look - I haven't got the look that everybody else has got. But of-course you know, nobody ever, ever said 'You've got long hair, you can't be a feminist.'

Yeah.

So it was sort of, but I, I so I was very strongly influenced by my sister. But she opened my eyes loads of stuff, you know, music and sort of political things and stuff. And she, she'd stayed there as well. She was there quite a lot. And lots of her girlfriends were as well. And they were there for great length - for longer lengths of time.

Has she sort of told you any of her memories, or do you remember any of hers?

No, no, I should - we could come back and do...

Yeah.

...interview two. And I could ask her about some of her memories. Or, indeed Becca could see her 'cause she lives in London.

Yeah. Good idea. So you said you obviously, you were a bit apprehensive and scared about going to Greenham for the first time I mean, how did you feel afterwards?

Oh, just that brilliant sense that, that you can actually make a difference. That you can, that you can, that you can change, change things, just through the power of numbers. And that amazing sense you get when you are with a group - large group of people, especially when you're with a large group of women, that you can you kind of feel invincible - you feel like you can absolutely do anything. There was a meeting recently - I don't know if you went to it, and I'll contact you about it and future if that happens again, but in Truro, with lots of women getting together about arts and - in-fact, Becca was there - and somebody just said it - that it was that sense of you sit at home and you go 'Oh god, what can I do? I'm powerless.' And then you get in a room with 70 other women, and you go 'Okay, yeah, okay. So we're not alone, we're not powerless, we can, we can make a difference.' Otherwise, you just feel, yeah, that you're like a drop in the ocean. But when you get together, it just makes you feel stronger. Yeah.

Amazing. How happy have you been, or are you aware of the representations of Greenham? So through like popular culture, and I think there was a film. I mean, how accurate, accurate compared to your memories do you think that is, if you've seen it?

I don't know. I haven't seen it. But, it'll be subjective won't it? It'll be - it will be the director's, but it depends if the director was you know, a woman who was wanting to share what it was really like, or if it was a woman who was against it and didn't you know, it depends on, on the tone of the piece of what, what the director had in mind when they made it. It's all going to be completely different, isn't it, on their slant?

How would you like to see it?

Oh, I'd like it, yeah, to see that it was just an incredible kind of consciousness of everybody getting together - all these women getting together, and harnessing the strength of women and Mother Nature. And overcoming, and sort of taking - reclaiming the earth, and you know, not having the, the destruction that you know, trying to get rid of that, and push that out of the country. I mean, you know, ideally we'd push it off the fucking planet, but yeah. Yeah, but that, that's what I'd like to see. And one would hope that that's what you will see. Because if it's a realistic thing, and, you know, there are invariably going to be people who are difficult - but you just want to see the best of it, really.

Um, what do you think has been learned from Greenham, and how do you think it has impacted on future generations of activism?

I don't know. I don't know, because I'm actually not that active politically. Um. And I don't do social media, so I don't even see what people are doing. And that might be me sticking my head in the sand, but I, I feel there's enough - I've got too much in my head, and I don't want to be bombarded by stuff all the time. And so I don't - I've never taken part in any social media. So I don't really know. But I would hope that it stands as a sort of a blueprint for you know, for the way that you can be active. And I would hope that it would inspire people. But I don't - like I said, I don't really know what, you know, what people do - whether there are ongoing things where people are - because after, you know, around the sort of same time as Greenham and after Greenham, there was all the Newbury stuff, the you know, there was Swampy so there were people living up in the trees to stop them building the Newbury bypass. So there was, it was a time of great sort of activism and people really showing their, you know, discomfort and anger at stuff happening, and just literally putting themselves in front of things, you know, bulldozers - whatever, to stop things happening. And just doesn't feel like people have got that any more. And I don't know why, but maybe, you know, maybe, maybe there are people doing it. But...

Yeah, but I suppose it's not as sort of, very heard of, or shocking, I guess. Maybe it was - with Greenham because it was so, such a sort of one off.

Yes. Yeah. And such huge thing. And I think it's about sacrifice, I think, probably because people sacrificed their normal lives, stopped going to work, stopped being at home stopped, you know, and actually went and said 'This is more important.' And I think probably that's, yeah, it'll be to deal with that - to do with sacrifice and what people are willing to, you know, live in a fucking tent you know, on a nasty, you know, in horrible weather, and in you know not good surround - I mean the surroundings I think, the common, but I mean...

The conditions?

Yeah, the conditions that you'd actually go through that to prove a point. And I think we're all - just feels like people aren't quite as sort of, yeah, people are less - more adverse to discomfort than they used to be. (Laughs). I don't know. But who's to say if something happened again, you know whether people will be prepared to do that - women will be prepared to do that, or I don't know.

Um. Yeah, I mean is anything else you'd like to add to the interview?

No, only that it was (sighs), I felt fantastic having gone and been, and been able to say that I'd been there - even though now, you know like 37 years, I can't actually remember much about it because I wasn't there - you know, I knew went the once. But it did feel fantastic. And coming away with that real feeling of just been - contributing to something or being part of something that felt like it was a really massive thing. That was, yeah, it was brilliant.

(Edit in recording)

(Sings) 'Old and strong. She goes on, and on and on. You can't kill her spirit. She is like a mountain. Old and strong. She goes on, and on and on. You can't kill her spirit. She is like a mountain.'