

Vicki Smith

Tell me how you first became part of the peace movement.

Ah right, I wasn't really part of the broader peace movement, I was at Southampton University and I heard about Greenham um, through the Women's Disco, which was you know, quite an unusual thing to have as an event at the time, so I met several er women there - obviously, and part of our, kind of, discussion somebody raised Greenham, and it had been in the news a little bit, and I was quite interested to see what was going on. So firstly became involved in Greenham just as a weekend visitor, really - went a couple of times, and then it sucks you in from there.

What is it about Greenham that sucks you in? What made you stay or come back?

Um, it was a very unusual set up for the time. The idea of protesting being done by women, was, by themselves, was directly related - to me - by the '70s Women's Movement which I was, you know too young to become involved in, but very interested in. So I was fascinated by the idea that it was just a women's protest, and that interested me, and obviously um, the political side of the reason for Greenham became apparent for me a little bit later, so I was there for interest, initially, and after a couple of weekends there I ended up staying - on and off for about 2 years.

Were you based at a particular gate?

Yes, I was. I was based at Blue Gate.

Was there anything particular that drew you there, or was that just an accident?

No, that was accidental - because I knew somebody who was at Blue Gate. And it was a scrappy little piece of triangular land, about 25yards from the gate, and behind that there was kind of woodland, so it was smaller than I'd anticipated, and of-course the road went right in front of the camp.

When you first arrived at Greenham was it what you had expected?

It was smaller. It was smaller than I'd expected because I'd seen it on the television and there'd been this, I think this kind of European wide women's meeting there, where there were enough women to circle the entire um base, and I believe it was about 10 - 9 or 10 miles round, quite lengthy. So I'd expected it to be much bigger and kind of, in some ways more organised. But when I was there at Blue Gate - the permanent residents - it would swell during the weekends and stuff, but the

permanent residents, there were only about between twelve and fifteen women at any given time. So quite small.

How important do you think it was, and to you personally, that Greenham was a women only space and women only actions?

I was intrigued initially, because I'd been quite sheltered really, I'd never come across any sexism or discrimination, that I thought I had, my - I was you know, an educated woman, I was at university, I had lots of male and female friends. I'd never experienced any discrimination, I was too young to have been in the job market or anything like that. But to me it related directly to the 1970s Women's Movement, and I thought it did - it attracted attention in a way it wouldn't have done if it had been a mixed camp, and I liked the idea of it being organised, run and just you know - totally women's only, there were no men there allowed - other than supporters of the camp, and they weren't allowed into the camp. So I was absolutely fascinated by this as an idea, and of-course it was a time when women were really quite vulnerable on the streets, I remember - having to be very, very careful - I think things have changed a little bit now, but um just the idea of camping out at night in a women only space was very attractive to me personally, and I thought it was you know, cynically quite a good marketing move.

(Laughs). What did you remember about how the camp was run on a day to day basis - the chores and the cooking?

(Laughs). Right, yeah. That was interesting. So there was a lot of one pot cooking, and to be fair a lot of it was done on open fires, and so it was a very welcoming place in regards to that. Everybody was welcome to share the food that was available, um, which was very unusual for me. I don't think there was a lot of washing up went on, to be honest. It was all vegetarian food, however, I do remember that - there was no meat there, and so I think probably, I don't think anyone got food poisoning, but there was no running water, so all the water had to be brought in - usually by male volunteers - in cans, um who would drop them off at the side of the roads. So somebody would do the cooking - probably one of the longer term women there, and um everybody would eat from that, kind of for better or for worse really - unless you could sneak in sandwiches (laughs)! So that was kind of - it was grubby, there's no doubts about it, it was grubby, there was no washing facilities for women at all there, so you had to be a bit careful. And then we used to dig what were called shit-pits, don't know whether you've heard of those before - out behind in the woods. So you'd trot off with your little spade and you were expected to dig a little hole and bury that, and there were absolutely no facilities there for washing your hands and stuff, so I'm surprised we didn't have outbreaks of typhoid or whatever, but we didn't, so it was absolutely grand. There was lots of tea on the go all the time - the mugs were always

brown on the inside all the time, I remember that - it's a habit I've carried on through until today. My tea mugs are absolutely rancid. Not milk, there was no milk because there was no fridge, obviously. So it was pints and pints of black tea. As much as you wanted. And occasionally alcohol. Occasionally wine - brought in - and I remember we were sending out requests for food, because you could send out requests for support groups around there, and we always had on it 'No more lentils for god's sake! Please send wine and chocolate cake!' (Laughs). So that's really what it was about. There was a bit of washing went on - you could wash your pants and there was home made washing lines and stuff, but there was nothing permanent about the site because quite frequently the whole site got cleared out and we were moved on. So we had to ready to pack up and go within an hour. And I remember one day having this genius idea that we would make the fire on a piece of corrugated iron with broom poles under both ends, so that we could start the fire, start the cooking - because you needed a fire, it as freezing in the winter, so you could start the fire, and then four women would pick up the fire using the broom poles and we would just run down the road with it on fire. Well it was complete and utter mayhem. Obviously it didn't work in any shape or form! The brooms were burnt, the fire went everywhere, there was just mayhem, so yeah, you had to move out in a hurry sometimes.

Tell me about those experiences of bring evicted, then.

Oh, well yes - they happened really rather frequently actually. I don't know how frequently, but I remember being on the go all the time. So they'd come by at ridiculous hours of the day or night - usually very, very early in the morning or late at night. I got the feeling it was for inconvenience, really. Nobody had any real malice, that I remember, about being moved on, it was just like 'This is life, off we go again'. So the accommodation was moveable, everything that we had was instantly moveable - you just packed it up and the police would come and ask you to leave - evict you with bits of paper. You'd move on, and after about an hour you'd come back. So it was fairly, fairly innocuous, there was no real harassment. I mean there was a lot of shouting - on our side, but I think it was bravado mostly, you know. Um, because we expected it - they knew we were coming back, they were doing a job, we were going 'Oh this is terrible', and then everyone just got back on with their lives an hour later, so it wasn't, it wasn't you know, traumatic or anything, it was just expected.

You never experienced any force or aggression from...

Er not outside of the base at all, never. No. And no abuse from the police, um, and I think there were bailiffs a few times. No, I mean I don't know if we were a smaller gate - I didn't have much experience of the other gates, perhaps they were a little bit more militant, I don't know, but at our gate it was a peaceful 'Up you get, off you go,

let's all shout at each other for twenty minutes, and er come back.' No aggression at all.

So you mentioned how cold it was.

Oh it was freezing.

What do you remember about the living conditions?

Bitter, bitter, miserable. So I was there with a friend of mine - Caroline, 'Hi, Carrie, if you ever listen to this' - my best friend at the time, and er, so we went everywhere together, we went to Greenham together, and initially we lived in her car. So we used to put the heating on at night and stuff, but you just can't do that, so I think the second weekend we brought a little tent and of-course er, we lost that in one of the evictions because you can't move them fast enough. So we went onto benders, which were (laughs) the most ridiculous things. They were basically - ours was metal, pieces of curved metal with canvas over the top, and the metal was just plunged into the ground, the canvas went over the top, you threw a groundsheet inside and um, er, it was blankets, I think, in those days, and you just got dressed up in about twenty layers of clothes with your hat and your gloves and stuff. And you had a towel pinned up at the front and the back, or whatever you could find. And in the morning the towels would be stiff with ice. And your, your um, the top of your clothes would have frost and ice on them from where you'd been breathing in the night. I mean it was very cozy inside, to be fair, but you had to be absolutely prepared. It was bitter, bitter cold. When you're outside 24 hours a day there's no chance ever to get war, properly warm so I think you know, you'd wear the same clothes, I hate to say it - months, really, frankly. It was quite a smelly place, but it was outside, so it didn't really matter. And everyone was the same - it was the most welcoming place, it really was, you know, it really was.

How did you feel about the way that decisions were taken collectively? Did you think that was an effective way of doing it?

Erm.

Were there ever any disagreements?

Oh god, yes. I mean it was a very diverse bunch of women, and there were some children about. Decisions about the day to day running of the Blue Gate were taken collectively, and decisions about sharing food were taken collectively, and that worked out very well. Um, it was a really good cooperative in that way and people would share what they had, there was no doubts about it. However the decisions that

were taken politically about action, um, caused some tension, because there was a significant group there that were there for peaceful protest - just by being there, and then there was a smaller minority, which I was one, which were more direct action. So I was part of that group, and that caused quite a lot of tensions, because any time you took direct action, that brought a very heavy police presence down on you and um, it kind of drew I think what they thought as - they didn't want to be part of that group creating mayhem and damage on the base, they just wanted to be there as a protest, so there was these two different factions. So that was quite strained, but broadly speaking we just didn't - we went ahead and did it anyway. I was one of the younger ones to be fair, I was probably the youngest at Blue Gate at that time, so I'm not really sure what went on in the higher decision making - mostly collective decision making I think.

What do you remember about the relationship between the women at Greenham and the local residents in Newbury?

Ah, strained. Strained. Um we used to occasionally go into the pub - we were banned from several bars, there's no doubt about it - not for behaviour, for appearance. No doubts in my mind, because I wasn't particularly badly behaved and we didn't have any money to get drunk, but we'd go for a couple of pints and then sneak into the ladies' at the back for a quick wash! (Laughs). So that was the only place we could really wash. So I think the relationships between the local pubs and us was very strained, you know towards the end we weren't allowed in any pubs at all, so far as I remember. Um the residents would chuck a bit of abuse, I think, as they go past. I think the men found it very odd altogether, so you'd get kind of abuse, because the road was you know, metres - there's the base - about 25yards, then there's the road, then there's another road there, because it was triangular and they would drive past, and they would throw things, you know, and shout a lot of abuse. There was a lot of stereotyping about 'Ah, you're a bunch of old lesbians', and all this - a lot of that kind of abuse - spitting, but that I think was in the minority. People would stare when you went into town, but not say anything, but if they came around late at night, drunk, in their cars, there would be abuse and throwing tins mostly - empty tins of Foster's lager. If they'd thrown full tins, it would have been perfect! (Laughs)

Absolutely. Did any of the women you knew when you were at Greenham have conflicts with their families or their partners for being there?

Er, yes. Yes they did. There were some women who had left their husbands to be there, I mean not, not, they hadn't divorced them or anything - they just said 'This is what I'm going to do now', um and it was still quite unusual. Despite us having the '70s and thinking everything was all sorted out for women, it was still unusual for

women to go in, in, in, the traditional houses - not in mine, I was younger, I've got very progressive parents, but, um, you know so there'd be women of 50 going 'That's it, I am no longer cleaning your toilet, I'm off to Greenham for the women, and for the company, and for the singing, and for the - I'm going to be do something before I drop dead.' And there were a lot of conflicts with their husbands, they were bewildered and they were angry men, and it was just kind of women standing up for - those women - form a different generation - standing up for the very first time, coming from all sorts of places yeah. So there were those sorts of conflicts, I think. But there were no mobile phones in those days, so um, they didn't come and - they weren't on the phone the whole time, but I knew some of the women were talking about their partners being angry, because it wasn't a lesbian base - it was mixed. There were a lot of lesbian and bisexual women there, but there were also a lot of straight women, and women come from nuclear families, so it was a hotchpotch, so yeah a bit of tension there.

It sounds like for a lot of women this was the first time that they had been free to do something for them, and felt empowered by that?

Yes. Absolutely. Yes. Because I think that those women were getting married and having babies in the '70s, where other women were up on protest marches and equal rights marches and all of this kind of thing - following on from the '60s equal pay stuff, and the pill, and the abortion marches. (Noise of door opening). Um, it's alright Mum, come in if you want to - we'll edit her out, she's forgotten we're in here.

She's very welcome to stay. I don't mind.

No, I mind! So um, yeah for a lot of women they'd come from a slightly different generation and this was brand new for them - they'd been married, they'd had their kids in the '70s when a lot of women were up and moving and getting politically aware, and they'd suddenly found themselves in their 50s with no kind of life of their own, and they thought this is something that I can belong to - I've never heard of anything like this'. And you know, a lot of them came for the weekend because that's all they could do - they had child care and jobs and stuff, but a fair few came and went 'Bugger that for a game of soldiers, this is what I want to do, to make a difference', and um for the first time they thought that they had some kind of political clout as well, because Greenham was on the telly quite a lot at that time, it was the big protest story, so yeah. And everybody was welcome - any age, any gender - sorry not any gender, but any sexual orientation, absolutely any age, um there were some male children there, but, so that was a bit tense. There was a bit of discussion about when we should ask them to perhaps go back to their fathers, I think it was about 10, I think was acceptable. There was certainly no adolescent males there, and it really was yeah, a kind of haven for some women, and the ideas that women were bringing

and sharing around the campfire were extraordinary, because these women ranged from I think 80 right down to about 16, so a whole, you know three or four generations together sharing ideas about women's political possibilities and freedoms and rights and some people had never heard of that sort of stuff, so it was great.

I guess for a lot of women there it was the first time they were allowed to be in a women only space?

Yes, I think it probably was. There was always the Women's Institute wan't there, before (laughs). It's not quite the same thing, but there have always been women's only spaces, but this was, you know, this was different.

In a political way.

In a political way, this was a women's only space. The first that I know of, so you know - in my generation.

What was it like having the children at the camp? Do you think that presented a particular challenge for the mothers?

Er you know, I was too young to consider their wellbeing at the time. However you know looking back on it, think it was probably inappropriate to have them around. They weren't at school, um, and I think any kind of that narrow education is impoverishing for a child. I think that broadly speaking children should be with other children of their own age and with a range of different people. It was a very narrow political slice there. Broadly speaking we all had the same kind of views - we all um, did the same kind of thing, um, the children weren't educated on site - they kind of ran wild, and some of them weren't particularly pleasant - I think they weren't particularly pleasant because I think they were probably angry. I mean I'm a child psychologist, now so this is retrospective. I don't think it was good place for children - there was a lot of swearing, there was a lot of open conversations - very open conversation that perhaps very young children, you know, could have been protected from for a few more years. But, you know, organisation-wise they weren't a bother they just - everybody helped to care for them, so it was no problem for a mum to have kids there, because whichever tent they went into, or whatever car they went into they were safe. You know they had twelve mothers instead of just one, so that was quite good.

What a lovely idea. What happened if anyone got ill or got injured - how were medical emergencies dealt with?

There weren't any while I was there. So I don't really know. You know there were various cuts and stuff - especially when we were breaking into the base, people got cut on wires, I think they just spat on it and put a bandaid on it, so there we go. We had TCP or whatever the - I think it was TCP...

I remember it well!

We had TCP, cotton wool, bandaids, we had eyewash because there was a a lot of ash and dirt, so there was a lot of eye stuff. But everybody was fit and healthy - you couldn't be out there for 24 hour days in the winter if you weren't healthy. I imagine if you had bronchitis, you had to go, yeah.

Now moving on now to your involvement in the non-violent direct action campaigns, tell me how were you involved, what did you do?

So there's two aspects for that, so like I said earlier there was kind of like the more militant arm of Greenham at Greenham itself, which I was part of. And then there was Cruise Watch. So Cruise Watch was a men and women protest, so both men and women were involved with that, and that was connected to the Greenham base because when the cruise missiles went out on driving around Salisbury Plain - what do they call their actions? When they're playing toy soldiers and pretending to be in a war, and I mean they all thought it was fun and games. So the Americans would all pile out and go off to um, go off to um, Salisbury Plain on their maneuvers, and it was always in the middle of the night - it was hilarious. The Greenham common women had a radio CB radio, so the - not at Blue Gate, we didn't have one at Blue Gate, I don't know which gate that was at. So they would contact um, it was called the tree - they would contact the top person on the tree of Cruise Watch, and they'd contact two others, and they'd contact four others, and they'd contact, you know, went down like that - that's why it was a tree, like a Christmas tree. Um and so I was on that network - on the tree. Wasn't one of the founder members, but I was there quite early on, so I was one of the earlier members. We all had CB radios in the cars - this was car based protest. So we'd all get into our cars after the pub and um, drive up to Salisbury Plain with our CB radios. And information would be spread by CB radio about where the cruise missiles were going - because they used a different path to try and avoid us every time. And you would get to a spot before - it was quite an efficient network - people knew what they were doing, and all the CB radios had charming names like Rosemary and Tulip, and I think I was something revolting like Turnip! I was most disappointed about being 'Turnip, come in Turnip, over and out!' Anyway we'd drive off into the Salisbury Plain and park the cars - hide them as best we could and then walk. And you'd get to the undergrowth by the side of the road, and it would be absolute silence. And we were often there for about an hour before they came out - before the missiles came out. And there was a row about whether

you could smoke in the bushes or not, because you know - I always did, obviously, because it was terribly boring, and you had a little hip flask. And then after about an hour you'd see some motorbike outriders, so some police would come through - British police on motorbike outriders, so you knew you were in the right spot, and you saw them coming. So you had to be absolutely silent in the undergrowth, because they were trying to catch us. And then after that, um, some American trucks used to come through, and they had dogs, and occasionally, occasionally one of the British police would stop and go into the bushes - if they thought they'd seen something - with dogs to see if they could find us and root us out, and if they didn't, they'd carry on. And there was gaps in between these things, so first of all the British with the dogs, motorbikes and cars, then a big gap, and then the American, what are they called? Jeeps - with all the squaddies on - very, very short haircuts, very blonde they were. They'd come through, and then there was a 2-3 minute gap where you all rushed out of the undergrowth and hurled yourself into the road, and I didn't do hurling in the road, I did standing up in the road - I did not want to be run over. And we'd - my friend and I, Caroline, Carrie, we'd taken sheets - we'd stolen them from the university and we'd written 'Blood on your hands' - very dramatic, on this big sheet, and so we had one side of it and one side of it. So we stood in the middle of the road and the cruise missiles had to come to a stop, obviously. And there, there was some law, I think - the squaddies couldn't touch us because we were British citizens on British soil, so they had orders to stay in the van, so they had to get the police to come back, and they'd already gone along ten miles, and there's some very enterprising engineering students at Southampton university, they used to get under the cruise missiles and cut the brakes. Now if you cut the brakes on a big lorry, the brakes slam on, they don't come off - it's a safety mechanism because otherwise you'd have these lorries careering around with damaged brakes and mayhem. So they'd cut the brakes - I don't know what type of brakes they were, I didn't get involved in that, and the brakes would slam on and the cruise missiles would be stuck, and everything backed up for miles down the road and it was mayhem. And then by that time, um, through the radio network all the - there was a Buddhist bunch of protestors, they all came in a sort of van - when we'd got them stopped - they all came up in a van and they were chanting away and ringing bells and stuff, and having a high old time. And then the television crews, which always knew what was going on, they would come in a little television thing, van. And they'd start filming us, so we were chanting, and the squaddies were looking really pissed off, you know, and eggs were thrown, and nothing ever serious, but they looked a bit pissed off - covered in egg. And um, and then eventually the police would come back with reinforcements, and they'd clear us off to the side of the road, and then a mechanic had to be called, and the mechanic would fix the brakes, and off they all went again. But you could have two or three hours on the side of the road, it was fantastic. And one man, I think, one year, ran his own car into the middle of the road and set fire to it, and it was then just in the middle of the road, and that was just mayhem because nobody could

work out how to move this flaming car so that the cruise missiles could come along. And of-course all the fellas on the, all the Americans were armed, as far as I remember, but, so that was - and then you'd all run home to watch yourself on television, or you'd go back to the camp if you came from there. So that was the first part of the direct action, and the other part was when I was living at Greenham - the direct action was breaking into the camp. So I did a lot of that. So the way that was done is somebody would have bolt cutters - a woman would have bolt cutters, this was women only, this part. Am I okay to carry on?

Absolutely, yeah this is brilliant.

So there would be a woman on the, a woman on the, I think Blue Gate might have been a bit more prolific about breaking on to the base than other gates, because I didn't see any other women in there when I was in there. But anyway they were all doing it at different times, I'm sure. So you'd cut a slit with the bolt cutters so that it was invisible - so that you could pull it aside and you could slip in. So the first couple of times we use boom, boom, boom, boom, there was no electronics I don't think in those days anyway, so you'd slip in - in groups, and you would kind of circle the base, having a look at things, and then kind of wander into the middle and eventually er, I think the second time I went in, I ended up on - where the silos were. There's kind of lumps, big lumps in the ground, and there was a big area - a concrete apron I think that might have been for helicopters - I don't think they could have landed airplanes - they must have done, I think it was the runway. Um, anyway we were on the actual silos running around, which are big grass covered heaps and er, they became aware of you on the base remarkably quickly, so you only ever got between 5 and 10 minutes on the base, usually, before they found you. And it was a huge base, so they were quite good at this. So a couple of army jeeps would come out, and they had dogs - they were sending the dogs in, and they were armed, and their job was to catch us (laughs), and bring us back. And what they would do then is chuck us out the gate. There was no kind of formal arrest or anything, with regards to that - maybe they just had routine patrols, I don't know. They would have dogs. I don't remember them setting the dogs off the leash ever, um but they were quite cross, I think this was quite a boring job for them to have to do - rounding up women from the inside of the base. But anyway you'd get chucked into the back of the van, the jeep, and we'd all have a little merry cross cultural conversation about your rights in our country and that kind of thing, and 'This is common ground, so can you kindly bugger off?' And they'd say 'Er, no thank you ma'am,' and all that - it wasn't quite as polite as that. And then they'd kick you out of the, the gate. But the irritating thing was I think they probably knew exactly where we were coming from, I'm sure they had watches, so if you came in at Blue Gate, they would take you to the far side of the camp and chuck you out at that gate, which was really annoying. So it was a 4.5 miles walk back to your own gate. So that's where some of the men came in handy, because they were

allowed to drive pick up patrols, so they would pick up the women who had been hurled out of the gate, and drive them back to their own gates, and they were allowed to contribute in that way. And then um, the about the third time I went in - third or fourth time I went in - cut the slit, ran in, got into the commissary. Fantastic! It was extraordinary - literally like going back to the 1950s, they had this great big supermarket on base - it was like nothing I'd ever seen. I don't know if you remember '80s supermarkets, but they were not big and flashy in the same way that they are now, and this was huge and shiny and lit up, and all these foods from all over America - I mean they were treating these people as if they were at home. And there were housewives with baskets in the supermarket, doing their shopping as if it was America. It was extraordinary. And so we fondly thought we'd blend in no bother at all! (Laughs). So in the '80s there was this trend for wearing American sweatshirts - college sweatshirts, so we go 'Right, if we wear jeans and these American college sweatshirts, no bother - they'll take us for Americans.' It was hilarious, we had absolutely no idea. So it was like walking into the Stepford Wives. So around the corner and into the commissary dashed these three or four women - absolutely stinking of campfires, with blue and green hair and camouflaged trousers and DMs on, and rather surreally Penn State University 1979 on in a desperate attempt to blend in! So, and we did no harm - we didn't steal, we just ran around, you know, just making our presence felt. And these women, these American women were just you know, dumb founded, they were the wives of - there was probably a village in there, I had no idea. These were the wives of the soldiers on the base. Anyway they rounded us up pretty quickly, and again out you go. And then the last time I was in, we cut a hole the size of a car and we drove the cars in and that was just extraordinary. So we had three battered cars, and we got them up to the runways, middle of the night tearing around the runways with the headlights off, whooping and hollering and just making a general nuisance of ourselves, and that - I think they'd had enough at that point, you know. A slit in the fence is one thing, but actually a car sized hole, and an organised - it was organised, um, so they sent the jeeps out, they sent the dogs out, the dogs were loose, the soldiers were loose with guns, and they eventually kind of herded us to a stop. We got detained for that, to be fair, and prosecuted for criminal damage and trespass. So I remember going to the local court - it was miles away, we all had to get dressed up in our finest dreadlocks and shiniest DMs and go into court. And we weren't objecting to the criminal damage case in the slightest, we'd damaged property which was theirs, but what we were objecting to was the trespass case, because it's common land and it belongs to the British people, and if I want to go on that land as a British citizen I have every right to do so. So that was the argument that we made in court - lost horribly. Fined and er, convicted of criminal damage and trespass, very many years ago. So that was that. And it was shortly after that, that I - not related to that in any way - that I moved on from Greenham. Very exciting times.

What a fantastic story, that's amazing. Um, so onto a slightly different topic, tell me about the creativity that was used at Greenham. How important was the art and the songs as part of the action?

Yeah, there were a lot, there were a lot of women's protest songs, which I can barely remember but about 'We go on and on and on' was one of them, um, a lot of those - I just don't recall them anymore, but we were always singing, we were always singing. Because there wasn't any television, and there weren't any mobile phones, and there's usually a guitar around so there were a couple of musical women, so it was part of the evening. The daytime was work, because there's bizarrely a lot to do in a camp - somebody's got to fetch water, or organise that, food, cooking, it just takes forever. Washing, you know, in a very limited way. But the evenings you'd build a campfire and cook and sing, and somebody would have a guitar, um, the - some were very talented, some rather less so, but everybody was accorded a spot - very equal, very open. With regards to the other art forms, I wasn't involved with those at all, um, those were kind of - as far as I know, more of a day or weekend visitor kind of thing, where they would do weaving on the fence. So the weaving was left on the fence there, but that was much more people coming to show their support - they would pin pictures up, or photographs up, a lot, a lot of weaving, multi-colored weaving and that kind of stuff. A little kind of airy-fairy or cowbells, or this chimes which we used to rip off and bury because they're a bugger in the middle of the night if you're trying to sleep! Sweetly meant, but no thank you. Um, and er I didn't really kind of get involved - I wasn't a weaver, I was more a cutter and getting-in-er, really.

Tell me how you think Greenham was portrayed by the media at that time.

Oh goodness, with - it was portrayed with, don't think it was negatives - it was bizarre surprise as if what on earth is going on? It was completely unexpected, really, completely unexpected how quickly it was organised, how efficiently women were contacted to come down for day protests. How efficiently the Cruise Watch network operated, how efficiently communication operated in a time when there were no instant communications. And it was just, you know, people would come down - you'd have the odd camera crew coming down and going 'Oh these are the bizarre Greenham common women specimens behind these bars, and see how they feed themselves at the trough.' So it was all, it was a kind of a zoo kind of thing. So it was definitely 'You are not mainstream people, you are other', and it was weird because if they'd actually interviewed many Greenham women - a broader selection, they would have found a very broad cross section of normal - you know regular people there. There were some significant mental health difficulties amongst some of the women there. There is no doubt in my mind there was one woman in my camp who had significant mental health difficulties, but it was a very inclusive environment, so it was a refuge for some who were unable to make it in the real world - who had lost their

housing - housing was available - it was a tent, but it was housing. So I think when the cameras came down they were probably concentrating on anybody who was visually interesting, and anybody who was obviously bizarre, so it was portrayed in a kind of zoo like way 'You are a different species of people altogether'.

So they picked their subjects, they picked their agenda?

Oh absolutely. No doubts about it. I wasn't ever interviewed when I was down there. They would go for you know, just some unusual type of people who were willing to talk - I wouldn't have been willing to talk at that point anyway. I wasn't sure enough in my own, er political views and stance to want to present that formally, but others didn't seem to mind. There would be a spokesperson I think, around one of the other gates, who would come out every so often and put quite a forceful view forward, but in an angry way. The women were portrayed as being angry, which they were - it wasn't just anger about the Americans coming into England when they shouldn't have done, it was anger about how women were being portrayed generally. Um, that did come through - we were portrayed as quite angry, or misfits in some ways, so you know, there it is.

Do you feel it changed at all over the life of the camp?

Not by the time I left no, no. I left before it finished, so, I don't know whether it changed. I went onto a completely different life, so.

So once you'd left Greenham and looked back, how did you feel about it, what did you miss?

Um, er, not the cold, not the shit pits and not the cookery. Not the lentils. But it was the first time I'd ever seen in my life what was genuine inclusivity, genuine. Er, everybody, no matter what their state of mind was welcomed and supported, and I'd never seen that, because it's not something that men do very well, I don't think. And I don't know whether we're hard wired to do it as women or not - to welcome and to nurture each other, but that was the ethos. So as I was saying earlier, there was a woman with very significant mental health difficulties there, some of her behaviours were very bizarre, but there was absolutely no condemnation of that, it was like 'Oh, you know', she was called Granny Annie - from what I remember, 'Oh Annie's - you know, she's kissing the front of the car', or you know - she was in love with her car, or 'It's about time somebody took her into town for a bit of a wash'. It was helpful and inclusive and she was considered to be part of this woven structure that was the camp. It wasn't silk - it was kind of knotty fabric with all different people in it, all with similar values. But that was the single thing that stuck out to me, one aim, um, er, one group, and no matter who you are, no matter what your capabilities are, no

matter what your contribution is, everybody is equally, equally valued, which I found extraordinary, and I have never come across again, actually, in all my life - early life of protesting. And I think it's something that could be usefully done at Shannon, we're all getting a bit involved in the same thing at Shannon airbase - I'm from Ireland, as you probably know, um, similar, why are the Americans on our soil? And there's some protests going on there, but it's not in the same way, but I think it's probably something that we could learn from. It was effective in the long run, as far as I know.

It was. It absolutely was. That was actually going to be my next question - in terms of political activism, what do you think has been learnt from Greenham, and how has this impacted future generations involved in activism?

I don't know really about future generations. I carried on with very strong political activism for about ten years after Greenham - it showed me that this is how you affect change. Obviously you're going to affect some change by voting, but sometimes if the parties that representing you are not offering what you want, you actually have to, perhaps, do a different kind of change. Um and if we hadn't done direct action originally we wouldn't have got equal pay, we wouldn't have got equality for women, we wouldn't have got access to abortion, we wouldn't have got access to the pill. I've been involved in those campaigns in Ireland very recently - thank god you know, we've won that one. But I think that possibly for the first time women banded together, taking a direct action about something impacts them - was a first, and that informed my political life, my political activism for the next ten years. I was at the poll tax riots, for example, um, I took a - I went on a date, I took my first date with a young man - 'Hi Duncan, if you ever hear this' to the poll tax riots, and I'd learnt an awful lot at Greenham, and one of the things I'd learnt was that if you are protesting on your home ground you have the advantage. So the poll tax riot, they were charging lines of horses along to clear the streets, and everyone was in the streets running away, screaming and shouting, and my date took off as fast as he possibly could in the opposite direction, and I'm hanging onto his hood going 'No, this is what we do, we step gently into this doorway, all the horses go by, we step gently out, and there we are with the action in front of us', and those kinds of skills and those kinds of things were taught to me at Greenham common. And, that you're not to be intimidated by, not to be intimidated as long as you're not hurting anybody, and as long as you're not damaging anything that really matters, and as long as you're not being abusive - seriously abusive, you are allowed to stand up, and you are allowed to tell people exactly what you want them to hear. And don't let them stop you, you know. There are ways and means that you can make yourself heard. And of-course it's on the Internet now, so those kinds of behaviours, these kinds of skills and behaviour are probably not so needed, but I'm not part of that internet protest generation - let them at it mate, let them at it. It's time for somebody else to do that.

Why do you think that the Suffrage movement has been so celebrated and talked about and discussed, whereas the peace movement hasn't?

Um, well the peace movement is slightly more complicated, isn't it. The Suffrage movement - for a start we're at a further distance, and heroes, the further away they are, the more heroic they grow - they're no longer normal people with grubby fingernails, they are, you know these fantastic, and of-course it's been glamorised in a certain way, we've had whatever is that - is it Chitty Chitty, it's not - Mary Poppins, Mary Poppins very glamorous, very glamorously presented, although a lot of the you know, the Suffrage movement were the middle classes, you know. Um, I think it's starting to be thought of as interesting, um it's the peace movement - the more broader peace movement that I wasn't involved in um, is too diverse, was too diverse. Um, there are sticking points like unilateral disarmament - at the time you could be a peace protestor and in the peace movement but not want unilateral disarmament. You could be a, pro, kind of, pro-alternatives to nuclear or anti-, you know, anti-nuclear power, which was closely linked - all that movement was together, um, and still be pro-Greenham, but anti...it was too diverse a political ground for everybody to stand together on. And the Suffrage was basically rights for women. Every woman, no mater what their political background could get behind that. And I know there were a few that were anti-rights for women - 'I don't need rights for women, my husband knows what's best for me' - well good luck with that, dear! Um, however if they hadn't been there, those women - and they were privileged middle class women, a lot of them - we wouldn't have been there in the '60s, we wouldn't have been there in the '70s, and Greenham wouldn't have been there in the '80s - so those are linked. But the broader peace movement cannot be linked, in my view, to the Suffrage movement because it is too diverse and there's so many factions, and you know - you get all into green energy then, you know and it's just got too big I think for it's own - for any kind of major, er major push forward. Whereas the Suffrage movement was one issue, which is always better. I mean I'd rather there was one issue, but at Greenham there was one issue, which was 'You're not allowed to be here, will you kindly bugger off?' You know, and 'We don't like your nuclear weapons, anyway!' (Laughs). So it's kind of one gritty issue you can get your teeth into. It's great.

Is there one moment, one memory that sums Greenham up for you - your experience at Greenham?

Oh, just, I mean I've told you the highlights really. But one morning when we were getting turfed out at about half past 5 in the morning, and it was icy, and out you get, you pull all your bedding out, you chuck it onto the ground - thank god it was icy because wet is worse. And I remember pulling the bender up - you used to have to go from the back and pull the spikes, pull the hoops out, bang, bang, bang bang, and the actual canvas had frozen, and it was splintering you know, because of your breath

on the inside, and it was splintering and pouring ice everywhere, and it was just ice, and I just thought 'What the bloody hell am I doing here?'. And I suppose I remember that very, very clearly. Yeah because it was er, you know, Arctic, although it could only have been about -3, and I was being a bit of a wuss!

Is that all? (Laughs)

Okay.

And is there one word that, for you personally, sums the whole of Greenham up?

Grubby! (Laughs).

That's interesting, we spoke to a woman on Wednesday who said 'triumph'.

Oh well, fair play, fair play to her!

Grubby is great. (Laughs)

It was all of those things, it was all of those things.

And finally, could you explain why you think it's important Greenham is remembered by generations to come?

It's absolutely essential for women and girls now to remember it. Absolutely essential, because - just because you are interested in politics, which is crucial for women. I mean if we don't get involved in politics - if 18 year old girls don't get involved in politics, the people who have, who ill-wish us as women, and trust me they are around - particularly at the moment there's a strong anti-feminist movement, there's a strong Incel movement, there are young men who are er, angry at women because they can't get access to women. They are shooting us in America, um and that movement is coming, by the way to England, so watch out - if we are not voting and getting involved in politics, and protecting ourselves, those men that are involved in politics will not be voting and passing laws in our best interests. Um, so you absolutely, primarily, you absolutely have to vote everywhere you can, no exception. And you have to group together because we're in a post-feminist time now, I don't like the way I see internet presenting young women and young women presenting themselves. It is absolutely fine to be attractive and beautiful, and you also have to be intelligent, educate yourselves - become politically aware and make those changes. And if you are young and attractive, you are in an amazingly strong position to do that, because people will pay attention to you. But don't objectify yourself, don't let anybody else objectify you, and don't forget what Suffragettes have done for you,

and the Greenham women have done for you, which is allowing you to behave in the way you do now. By all means wear short shorts, I've done it myself, it's not a problem - but make sure you are aware of why you're doing it, and it's your choice, and you are strong and confident.