

Sue Lent

Perhaps you could just tell me a little bit about your background, um, before we get to the actual march that you joined - where you were born, your work, that sort of thing.

Um, I was born near in Manchester, small, small place near Manchester, grew up in Lancashire. I came to Cardiff um, to university when I was 18. And um, I stayed in Cardiff. Um, I trained after my degree, which was in English and philosophy, I worked for a couple of years - I worked for probation as sort of fairly lowly, paid, kind of ancillary person and then I did social work training for 2 years, qualified in 1978, and worked in Cardiff until I had my eldest child Christopher, who was born in 1980. Um, I've since - I've got three children, I have worked in social work then while I sort of went, went back, um, worked in childcare, social work, and then specialised in children - working with children with disabilities. Alongside that I was elected as a local councillor.

What year was that?

I was elected in 1989. It was a bit kind of thrust upon me really, I hadn't really, I wouldn't say I'd never thought about doing it, perhaps eventually, but the timing - it was just how it was in the ward, and needing somebody to do it who had got some sort of base in the ward. At the time I'd got my two sons, they were in the local school. We'd run a campaign in the party to try and get a nursery there, which was successful, and it was, it was a kind of um, a friend of mine who had stood the previous time and got in, in the other part of the ward, um, who I'd known through work and was a close friend, she sort of encouraged me to stand. So, it wasn't...

Do you think your experiences at Greenham - part of that march to Greenham, did that have an impact on...political...?

Yes, I would say definitely. I mean, as far as the people that were on the the original march, um, there genuinely were people, women who had never been on anything political, you know, the sorts of classic 'I've never been political and done anything and, and now I'm, you know, suddenly concerned about this issue.' That didn't apply to me, I became interested in politics when I was at university. To begin with, on the feminist um, angle, I started going to sort of women's groups and conferences, and then kind of came to a realisation fairly quickly. I was mixing with a lot of political students at the time. And I came to a realisation quite quickly that um, feminism couldn't just stand alone, that, in my opinion, um, it had, you had to have socialism to have women's rights, really - it wasn't something that I saw as possible under any sort of other kind of regime. So, I became a socialist. I got involved with things like anti-apartheid, um, Ireland, troops out movement, and this was all kind of mid, mid '70s, I suppose onwards. So and, and also CND. And when the whole anti-nuclear stuff started again, I can remember that year going on a CND march in Manchester and I was visiting my parents...

What year was that?

Um, well the year of the march, of-course, was 1981, so that year I can remember going to a CND march earlier that year. And so, so, you know, I certainly wouldn't say um, that I wasn't, um, I wasn't political. Um. I mean, for me, the actual march itself, was not a particularly considered decision - unlike most of the women, because they'd all come from all over the place, and made very elaborate arrangements, taken leave from work or made arrangements for their children.

How did you find out about the march, actually?

Well, I originally saw an advert for it in The Guardian, which the year - what I should say, as well, the year - the academic year between September '80, just after Chris was born, he was born the July - between September '80 and um, sort of July, sorry between September '80 and July '81, we'd been living up - my husband had been doing a one

year, postgrad at Keele University, so we'd been up there for a year. So to an extent I'd been sort of out of, out of things - I'd visited a couple of times. As I say, I remember going on that CND march I think it was the April at um, in Manchester when we were up there. But I do remember seeing the march advertised in The Guardian. Um. And it was a bit of a laugh really, because when the people talked about, women talked about it, they always said 'I saw it in the paper', like for some reason they didn't like to say it was The Guardian. But I definitely remember seeing it in The Guardian, because I would read The Guardian from cover to cover every day. It was, it was delivered in this little van because we're living outside the country, and this man used to come up with it in his van and sort of, you know, basically only human contact I got some days was taking the paper off him, apart from the baby, obviously. But um, so I do remember seeing this about, about the this march, but then it'd sort of gone out my mind. And what happened was, we came back at the end of July, and then in the, 'cause was the march was the end of August. And what actually happened was that I rang a friend of mine who lived in Newport, er, Mary Crofton who was about, well she was well into her 60s then - very political woman, and um, very well known. She was Irish, and very well known in Irish politics. I rang her, and she said 'Are you coming on the on the march tomorrow?' Um. So I said ' Oh, well, we'll do the first leg to Newport then.' So we actually set off the next day. Remember having the radio on, and hearing Ann Pettitt on the radio and everything, and we went down...

Was that local radio?

Yeah, I've, I've - in my diary, I think it says Cardiff Radio, which I don't think exists now - it's probably a station - it doesn't say Radio Wales, because they say, I have recorded - I did record all this in a diary. So it was with local radio, certainly.

So there was media coverage at the beginning?

There was very good media coverage in Wales, and has been ever since really - anything that comes up is, I mean, the number of times I've done

radio interviews with Radio Wales, I can't tell you. Because I'm local, and I'm still - I'm in Cardiff and, and they've got my name and obviously, because I did interviews on council stuff as well, you know. So yeah, I went down - John and I, my ex-husband went down to City Hall.

That was the gathering point?

That was the gathering point, with the baby in the push chair. And, he was just turned a year, he was a year in the July.

So still in nappies?

Yeah. And um, yeah, I mean, fortunately, I was breastfeeding him, so I didn't have to worry too much about bottles, and all the rest of it. But um, so we went down and there was quite a crowd there. There was quite a crowd there, from a lot of local people had come, and quite a few Newport who'd come across and then walked back.

So that was to see you off?

Yeah, and to walk with us for part of it. So we, we did the late - it was hot all the way through, we did the walk to Newport. I remember we stopped in Llanrumney for lunch, er, which is just on the outskirts of Cardiff. And I wondered for ages afterwards about this church, because I've never passed it along there, and apparently it's not there now - it's Llanrumney Methodist Church. We stopped there for lunch. And what was a complete revelation to me everywhere we stopped, I mean, it was so well organised that they'd they'd got lunch everywhere - it was just food, food, food. So every lunchtime, every tea time there was food sent. Yeah, it was very well organised.

And who was providing all this?

Mostly churches, mostly churches.

Quakers?

All kinds of churches - the Quakers, there's a Friends' Meeting House in Cardiff, right, very close to actually to where you were staying. If you were to just go on to Queen Street, and cross Queen Street and into Charles Street, it's just down there. Um, so the women who'd come from a way arrived on the, on the, because it was what day of the week, it was a Thursday we ate off - they must have arrived on the Wednesday night, and stayed at the Friends' Meeting House that night. Obviously, I didn't do that bit. And then, as I say we walked to Newport - very hot. Um. It's, it was, well, it was, I mean, I think up until the lunch stop was fairly easy. And I think a lot of the people from Cardiff walked out with us, and then it's kind of in the afternoon it got a bit more tiring, you know.

Were you on the main roads?

We were on the main roads. Yeah, we walked all along the A48, isn't it?

Did you have a police escort or anything, or were you just on your own?

We did. And again, it's funny looking at my diary because I've recorded that. And I do remember this now, that there was a very large policeman on a police bike, with sweat pouring down his face. And I've also recorded that we were continually being offered a lift in the police car, because of-course, we'd got the baby. And I think John was probably carrying Chris a lot of the time, I mean, he probably slept a bit in the pushchair. And then I think he was carried quite a bit of the time, and that happened quite a lot with the police, all the way along really to Greenham, was that, you know, they'd say 'Do you want a lift? You've got the baby.' And you'd think, no I'm going to walk - absolutely pouring with sweat! Really boiling hot and tired.

But the police were helpful, then?

They were, they were very good. Yeah, yeah, they were fine - there was no hostility or anything, all the way along. And I think Karmen in

particular, sort of charmed her way - she was in, in charge of the kind of liaison with the police a lot of time. I think she just sort of charmed them, really.

Where did you sleep along the way?

Well, it was mostly it was...

How many nights did it take you?

Was it 9 nights? Because it was from, I think, the 27th of August, which was a Thursday. So the following Saturday, so for some of the women it would have been what Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday - 10 nights before it started. I mean, for me, we came back from Newport - got the bus back. And then John took me over the next day. So I had 8 nights away, I think. I think I only spent 2 of those 8 nights actually on a floor, because there was a lot of accommodation offered.

Oh as well as food?

There was loads of accommodation offered, and I think in some of the places I think, um, I mean Newport I think were very good. Obviously I didn't need accommodation there, but the next stop was in Chepstow. And I think everybody had accommodation there. And good accommodation with families and that. Um. I mean it varied, but I - the only, maybe I had 3 nights, no, maybe I had 3 nights on the floor because I know um, when we got to Melksham, I know I was on the hall floor there because there was, because I rather, rather sort of rashly, probably was persuaded by - I blame somebody else by Janet, Janet was there, she had her 15 year old and a baby the same age as Chris, and she was sort of all very blasé about it all with me, I mean, it was my first child. And we went out to this concert with um, Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl. And we got the babies to sleep. She said 'Oh, they'll be fine.' You know, and a couple of the younger women were there, and we said 'Oh, you know, you'll be here, won't you', and of-course, you can

guess what happened - when we come back, we couldn't get into the hall, and we were knocking to try and wake - these young women had just gone to sleep - it wasn't that late, they were probably shattered, and the knocking woke Chris up, and I could hear him crying in there, so I ended up getting, I think it was Lynne's boyfriend, who was there for part of the time - I think he actually broke the window to get in. So by which time I think Chris had gone back sleep anyway.

Where was this?

That was in Melksham. So I must have been on the hall floor there. And I think Hungerford, I'm pretty sure we're on the hall floor - because there wasn't any kind of big group there. The vicar came out on his own and said 'I'm Hungerford CND', and um, it was a nice big hall, so I think I slept on the floor there. And possibly one other, but I did have very good accommodation.

You did - did you go through, you went through Bristol, didn't you?

We went through Bristol. Um, I stayed with a very nice family there who met us, and then they came on part of the route the next day - they have two children who were just at that age they thought well we'll bring the double pushchair, and they were a bit big for it, but they're a bit small to, to walk very far. So they sort of turn - they came on that that part of it.

Was it Bristol that um, EP Thompson's wife talked - Dorothy?

Yes. Dorothy Thompson.

Did you hear her?

Yes.

What did she talk about?

I think I heard her speak more than once. But I think basically she spoke about um, the effects of radiation. I mean I think that was her big thing, and the effect on children, the medical effects, I'm pretty sure that's what it was. Yeah.

Did anyone else speak enroute?

There were, there were speakers everywhere, but I don't remember all the names - I did, I definitely recorded her name in my diary - Dorothy Thompson, but other places - lot of church people, who sort of greeted us, because it was very much church based, and in terms of the churches I mean, again this was a bit of a surprise to me - I don't know what I expected, but I mean like we said earlier - Friends' Meeting House on the night before the walk set off, but we were hosted by Llanrumney Methodist, we had um, Anglican - all you know, all variety really, er, Catholic, Catholic er, priest who actually when he - I can remember we were all crammed into a cafe having food, when we got there, and it was all very hot and everything, and I do remember this Catholic priest making this welcome, and making this speech, and saying that the Pope had just - I think the day before - put out this edict against nuclear weapons. Um, and then suddenly we were sort of whisked away. I mean, I mean, I missed some of the things that went on in the evenings because of having Chris with me. Um.

Did you just stay behind?

Well, because people would come and take us to stay. And then obviously, I'd go off with them, which was just as interesting, because I met more, you know, those of us with children, I think we met more people and had good conversations, and got to know things that were going on in their area. But we might have missed some of the sort of later evening speeches and stuff. And I know in Chepstow there were - I think there were speeches, then, and the musical bit, I think we got there for that bit. But probably with the children, but it's, you know, is a different experience, if you've got a baby with you. And obviously, you've got to put them first. And I think, a lot of the discussions that

took place about what was going to happen at the end, I sort of missed, because my recollection had just been that we'd had this one big meeting where we decided things, but it's quite clear when you listen to Ann, or you look at what she's written that - no, actually I do remember two, I do remember two meetings, but I wasn't party to some of the other discussions.

This is prior to setting out?

Well, no, this was prior to deciding that some of the women chained themselves up when we got there. There were discussions in a couple of places.

Was everyone involved in those discussions?

I say, well, what I recorded was that everyone was involved, and that we have this long meeting in Hungerford where I think, I think it was Hungerford, but because we'd only done - it was a shorter day, I think - we had, I think we had the afternoon and we had a long meeting. I remember the men taking the children out and looking after them for us, and that so that we could listen, and then my recollection is that there was another meeting to make the final decisions a day later, but that I, I definitely left that meeting because one of the women - there were three of us were babies, there was me Janet and Jenny, but Jenny went out because her child was crying and somebody had sort of expressed irritation at this, which I went out, and we were sort of, again, I've recorded this in my diary that we were sort of commiserating out there about how much harder it was. And, and I think whereas like Chris, and Becky, which was mine and Janet's, they tended to be actually quite, quite good, humoured all the time, and we were still breastfeeding them both, and they didn't really - they needed entertaining, but they didn't sort of cry a lot. Whereas Jenny's little boy was a little bit older and I think he got quite fed up sometimes. So, you know, she took him out, and I came out - so it may be - that may have been when I missed some stuff that was going on, because Ann certainly records that they went around the room and that halfway around, people were saying 'Oh, they

weren't sure about doing this'. It wasn't what they originally signed up for, and that. Whereas I've only recorded one person - who was a man, Alan - saying it was against his principles, whereas Ann's recording I think, maybe I'd left - records that when it got to Eunice, she said 'Well, you know, we've come all this way, we're not just gonna go home for nothing', sort of thing.

So Alan was against in principle...

Alan - this was - the chaining to the fence, which was laughable looking back in a way, because it - that was a peaceful protest. It wasn't like we were suggesting, you know, lobbing bricks through somebody's window or something, but...

Out of all these people on the march, mainly women, did they cover all political persuasions? Did you talk about that?

Um, there were definitely other Labour Party - I mean, I was in the Labour Party. Um there were the Labour Party women. Eunice was a Labour councillor in Swansea. And she was in her 60s, and very feisty, and she was the one that I think Ann was relieved when it got to her said 'Well, you know, we've come all this way. And you know, women have done things in the past a lot more dangerous, you know, I'll chain myself up.' And I've got a photo of her chained up, with, with Chris, and one on her own. So she, I mean, she was definitely in the Labour Party. I'm fairly certain there were - well there were there were other people who were in the Labour Party. I don't know of anybody that was in other political parties. I mean, I don't know where the Greens were, then. I don't know whether they were active or whether they existed. I mean, they certainly weren't any Tories.

Apoliticals?

There was there were lots - a lot of people who I think basically had a fairly socialist outlook, but might not have been in actual parties. Um, I mean, interestingly, I think a lot of those - a lot of the women did join the

Labour Party in the next couple of years, because they did actually have an anti-nuclear position around sort of '83 and that, so there was a sort of influx of people, but I don't think - I'm not sure how much it had started in '81, I'm not really sure. Yeah.

So tell me about when you arrived on the common.

Um, well, we arrived a big, big march up there - coaches from London and that. I remember Pat Arrowsmith being there. And I'm pretty sure Bruce Kent spoke as well. And um, yeah, we'd sort of - we'd kind of developed this sort of, very kind of jovial style. I think we'd all started singing and dancing and you know, wearing very little, and putting our scarves around, you know, around our heads and different things - because it was, was so hot. And we got up there, the women were chained to the railings, they'd gone up earlier, and I think there's an account in Ann's book of how Karmen read out this sort of statement. And wanted the commander of the base to come out, which he didn't do. There was there was some keeners there. I mean, I thought I was right in the end that there had been something about oh they thought - the people at the base thought they were the cleaners, so they didn't take much notice of them. Then there were these keeners up there, so I thought of they meant the keeners, but actually, they were both - it was both.

Keeners being the ones making the noise?

There were keeners there. Yeah. Who were sort of making all these wailing, these waning sounds there from quite early on, I think. But they, but it is true that the people at the base thought they were cleaners, because they were women! And didn't take much notice. So I don't think it was too difficult for them to get the chains on.

And the chains had been purchased where?

Yeah, they'd bought, must have bought...

Or carried the whole way?

No, no, no, they bought them the day before, I think. And they were long chains. I mean, as I say, I'll show you the photos afterwards, because I have got photos of Eunice changed up, but, and all of them had asked for - they'd said each of them would have a supporter. And again, I'd forgotten this, but I'd recorded in my diary that Helen John asked me to be her supporter, but I just didn't feel I could with the baby. And...

What would the role of the supporter be, exactly?

Well I don't know if they swapped with them if they needed the loo or anything like that, or they just - it was just to see whether they needed anything.

Water?

Yeah, but, yeah, so it was good idea really. So there was, so there must have been, you know, eight went up.

What was the police presence that day?

Um, not massive I don't think, I think they were just - I mean, it was quite a big march up there. So obviously it would - they would have had a presence of being, just supervising, but I don't think they were expecting you know, any trouble or anything. It was quite a long walk up to the base because it's you know, from Newbury, it was - what was it 9 miles all the way around. There's quite a long way up to the main gate. When we got there, there was speeches, lots of singing and joviality. And that really and then, I suppose eventually people started to disperse, and the chained women stayed, and a lot of the other people stayed.

How many people of the original march from Cardiff to Greenham stayed the night? Did they all stay?

Um, I don't know what proportion. I mean, I went, I stayed, I mean, my husband had come up to Newbury on the last day. So he was with me. But I think he, he, I don't know that he stayed all night - Marjorie, who was the only other woman from Cardiff, who, again she was in a 60s then, so she died a few years back in her 90s. We were the only two from Cardiff, which meant, and her car was used all the way up, which meant that her car, I could go back in. And she had a son living in Reading, which wasn't that far away. So I stayed with him and his wife for a few nights. Um. Marjorie went backwards and forwards to see what they were all sort of getting up to. Um. And then we went back a few days later and Ann came back with us. I don't know if it was just Ann, came back, but I know, I know, she she came back with us. And was - everybody was really kind of ecstatic that people were staying there and it was continuing. Obviously, they had no idea how long it would be. And I mean, some of the women that stayed - Eunice as I say, who was the Swansea councillor, she lived up there for a while going backwards and forwards - she would come back for council meetings, and then she go up there. Helen John stayed, which of-course caused a lot of consternation, at the time, there's a bit of a joke - I remember Marjorie saying to me that somebody had rung her husband and said 'Oh, she's a bit tied up', you know, she was chained up. And she stayed, which I think was quite hard on her family, because she had five children. And the youngest, I think, was three and came on the first bit of the march. And then her husband came and got him because he was, you know, a bit fed up and miserable - a bit too big to be in the pushchair all the time, you know. And um, so he, I think her husband came and got him when we were in sort of Bristol, maybe. Um. Again, there's a photo which I'll show you, which was taken for a compilation of women in Wales each year, and the 1981 picture's got a picture taken from the back - of us going over the Severn Bridge, which Marjorie took. And you can see me - the back view of me of the pushchair, but next to me, you can see Helen John with her pushchair. But I think he, I think, I think her husband probably came up to Bristol and took him back. So of-course, he'd got the five children. And she just stayed and went, went all over the place and went to other peace camps, and was a

peace campaigner for the rest of her life, really. I mean she died, um, the year before last, I think - it was quite recently.

Two years ago, she died.

Um.

So that was quite a commitment.

Yeah.

And obviously, this is pre cruise missiles arriving.

It was pre cruise missiles arriving.

So what was on the base when you arrived? Because it was just an RAF commandment? I don't think the American one pitched up at that stage.

I'm not sure, really. It was all very, very secret, but the missiles didn't start to come until '83, I think.

And the camp commander wouldn't meet you? You did ask to meet him?

No, I'm sure he didn't, because that was the sort of condition we wanted him to meet with us.

Also the Minister of Defence at the time refused to debate with you, didn't he, I think?

Yeah, I mean, I think, I think it was it was interesting, the politics with a small 'p' of it all, because at the time, I mean, I'm sure Ann will tell you this, I mean, CND were just not on board, really. I mean, not that they were hostile, but it was like, well, who were this group of women? I think, I think they did give a small grant, but one thing that was, was

clear on the march was that there were CND groups that were involved at each stop on the way, but it was very much the churches that were, that were helping with everything. And it was um, and particularly in Bristol, considering the size of the place, there wasn't much going on in terms of people meeting us. You know, I think I, I kind of found that, I think it was Marlborough had a huge group of people lined - people lining the street, you know, and this sort of thing when we arrived. So small places were managing to, you know, this was a big thing for them and were sort of turning out a lot of people and putting on a huge spread of food and that. Bristol was very, very sort of whatever the word is - sort of not depressed, but you know what I mean? It was it was very low key, low key, I suppose is the word I'm looking for. And I think because it took us an awful long time to get there. You know, it was, it was a, it was a long walk and I remember walking down Black Boys Hill with Ann, and she carried Chris a lot of time. And I mean, there was just when we, when we got to the - is it the Bull Ring? I'm not sure what it is called in Bristol, but there's sort of area that's a kind of public area. I suppose it was a bit late by then, but there was hardly anybody there when Dorothy Thompson spoke and that.

Oh, really?

And I can remember Chris kind of crawling around in his vest, you know, just looking really, really grubby, but there weren't that many people there. I mean as I say, I stayed with a lovely family so they must have turned up but I mean, even the next day when we set off again, there were, there were some people walked with us, but they hadn't built for it, I suppose, is what I'm saying - whereas CND groups really taking off so somewhere like Bristol should have been able to really advertise it at the CND groups, they should have been saying 'Look, come and meet these women who who are doing this about the cruise missiles,' and should have put on a big, they should have put on a big meeting to be honest in the evening or something. I mean, Chepstow managed to - you know, a much smaller place. Melksham managed to have a whole concert by very well known, you know, Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl, but Bristol was just, you know, very damp squib. I mean Bath they were - we

coincided with the Bath festival. So, we did sort of get a good reception there, because there were lots of people there, and I remember Ann speaking in this big marquee, fairly informally, you know, it was we were all gathered round, but there was - so Bath was quite good. But um, yeah, I mean it was um, and when, when the women stayed at Greenham, it was quite odd coming back and knowing that they were there, and I mean, I don't think - I couldn't even drive at the time. I mean, you know, and communications were so different obviously, we didn't have mobile phones and that, so I remember I felt quite cut off here. Because...

Did you want to be back there?

Um, I um. Yeah, I suppose I did, really. I wanted to be with them all. But I didn't think it was practical with a with a baby, you know. And what had happened that year was that my husband having finished the course, and us having come back, he'd actually got a job away. So I was on my own, so it wasn't even like I could - you know that I was sort of sharing the childcare or anything, although I wouldn't left Chris obviously 'cause I was still breastfeeding him. But um, so it was an odd feeling, and I can remember we had this bookshop which was called The Gone Away bookshop, which was just - in Cathays. And I remember going in there and putting up this little notice saying that you know, that the woman were still there, and that we, you know, we'd done this march and everything.

How did you describe the purpose of them being there? What did you say it was?

Um, to highlight the fact that cruise missiles were going to be based there, and what up threat they were going to pose, and what a danger, you know, that they would make as a target and that it wasn't it was, it was an American base. We didn't have control over it and the Americans were just going to bring these cruise missiles in and, and, and this sort of thing. So I think people were generally aware of the

threat, they might not have actually heard the name Greenham common, but I think in CND people were getting very clued up.

Was it NATO, under the auspices of NATO, that the missiles were being put at that base?

Oh, I think, I suppose it was, but it - yeah, it was very much a thing between Britain and America. It didn't involve the rest of Europe, I suppose that was the point, wasn't it? It was and, you know, the British government agreed to that, had made us a target. And there was all this stuff about first strike missiles as well, because all the kind of deterrent stuff that was always spouted at you all the time, was clearly not really going to apply. And, and just how dangerous the transportation of them was. I mean, on the route up there, there was, there was this pamphlet that you, that the government invented called 'Protect and Survive', so of-course our answer to that was 'Protest and Survive', but, but a similar document, I don't know whether it's the exact one. But again, I've recorded in my diary that at one of the small places on the route, I can't remember which one now - that document had been put through people's doors the day before, almost like they knew we were coming or something - quite odd. But it was topical in that people were being told, you know, how to, how to build a little bunker, and that was clearly nonsense. And were informing themselves. And there was a real fear, which I could remember feeling at the time, that we really were going to be wiped out. I mean, I know it could still happen now, but, but it seemed very present at that time. I think we all genuinely felt that if we don't do something about this, we're all going to be wiped out. And there was a big um concentration not just on the nuclear weapons, but the whole new thing, and nuclear power and radiation. An um, I say that's what people like Dorothy Thompson came in. And lots of scientific people would come and give talks about just how dangerous radiation was, and all about birth defects, and how it was passed down the generations, and how everything you know.

Do you think you being a mother affected...

Definitely, definitely, definitely. And what was, what was quite significant, I mean, there was a whole spread of ages of women, and as I say there were a few men as well. So there was a whole spread from young teenagers who had come with their mothers, to student age, right the way through, I mean, I was still in my 20s, then - right through to women in their 60s. But there were an awful lot of women who had like four or five children. A lot of mothers. Ann, and Karmen and the other two who were involved in the original organisation were all mothers, Helen was a mother of five. Marjorie was a mother of four, Janet who had her youngest Becky with her was a mother of five, I think four or five. Um. Eunice again, four or five children...

And grandchildren, maybe?

And yeah, oh and grandchildren. Yeah. Oh yeah, there was, there was several of them my grandchildren as well. I mean Mary Crofton who, who was the one who I spoke to the night before and who supplied the sheet which became the banner at the back with the route. She came out and did quite a bit of the walk the next day, and went on one that we had the next year, but she was still working. And I think she was 65 at the time, and she's still working - so she couldn't do it all, but what she was another one who had five children. So, you know that was significant to me that there were so many who - so many mothers, but also so many had quite large families. I mean, obviously I only had Chris at the time, but I mean, my second son was born the following autumn.

So '82?

'82.

Before the first Embrace the Base?

Yeah. And we went up, the four of us went up, John as well, we went up on a coach from Cardiff. And...

Who organised that?

That was CND. We had Tom with us as a baby. He was only a couple of months, and Chris must have been about 2 and a half.

So what was that like, Embrace the Base?

Oh, that was amazing. Um I wish I'd stayed at the Welsh gate. We sort of made our way around to another gate where there was a crèche, but it's not like we used it at all. Or, you know, I think there might have been a little bit of stuff for Chris to do there with John or something, but, and I think there was a feeling from some of the women that men shouldn't have come, but I couldn't have gone up if John hadn't come up with me, really. I suppose unless I just taken Tom on my own. And then he hadn't come and he'd stayed back with Chris, but I mean, I think it's fair enough that there were. But I think the men it was sort of told, was sort of told 'Oh, you know, go to the gate where the crèche is, and help there', so we kind of, we ended up I mean, the long - the top and bottom of it was that, although yeah, it was it was fantastic. And we embraced the base and everything, we were separated from our group, really. And there were so many coaches, I don't think anybody had realised, so you know, they'd say 'Well, the pickup point is,' and they'd arranged, well, we'll pick up from the Welsh gate, because there must have been a Welsh gate by this time, you know, they had different gates and different things. And then we'll pick up from the gate has got the crèche, and we waited and we waited. And it was just us, because I think other people who had come with babies had gone back to the Welsh gate, and we hadn't, and we were just stuck there on our own, and I always remember Chris saying 'Coach will be here soon'. Because we'd been saying 'Oh yeah, it's gonna come.' This coach isn't going to come - we're going to be stuck with a baby and a toddler, and we won't be able to get back! But anyway, it did turn up eventually - I think there were two coaches, but the coach did turn up. And I think they were relieved to see us as well. And we got on - everybody else was already on there. We got on, thank goodness for that.

Did you leave anything behind on the fence?

Yes, we left, I think I left a little baby vest, and possibly some shoes, definitely a vest. Um, possibly other things - but I remember definitely thinking well, what could I leave? You know, that's significant.

What was the reaction, because you had the police guarding that perimeter fence, were there troops behind as well?

Um, I can't remember.

Do you remember any interactions with the police that day or...?

No, not really at all. No. I think there may have been stuff going on at other gates that might have been a bit more dangerous. Although that may have been more with later Embraces, because later ones that I went on, I can remember seeing some of the Cardiff women being sort of manhandled and carted off, you know.

Did you go the following year? Because, I think in '83 - was that one where the fence came down? Or people tried to take sections of the fence?

Um, when did I go up? I definitely went to the later Embrace the Base. And I think that's when I saw women being carted off, when there was a lot of this going on with the fence. Yeah, definitely. Definitely.

Did you experience any verbal abuse yourself, or physical abuse?

No, but then I would have kept out of it, because of the children really, and because I'm a bit of a coward, I think. But I, because I had Tom the next year, I mean, I've got photos where I've gone up to events with him as well, or and walked around the base, but, you know, I had him then as a baby, and breastfeeding him - I seemed to breastfeed my children for an awful long time, all three of them. So, you know, I didn't feel I could be separated from them. So even in sort of '83 when there was a lot

going on, and the missiles came in, I mean, he was tiny, obviously he was a baby. So...

How often do you think you went back? Can you remember?

Oh load the times over the years, um, sometimes to events - I remember the one where they joined up with Aldermaston, and CND did that one, but that was an Easter one when they went all along. I went to things like banner makings, and I went up just, just just to visit, and just to take stuff and that.

Did you take food?

Yeah, yeah. When I - when it was the 10th anniversary, there was no, there didn't seem to be any an actual major event up there. Um. But we just decided, we - I think it fell on a weekend and we got up one morning and just decided we'd drive up there. So the five of us went up, because I'd had Rachel by this time and, and she was sort of pretty much the same age as Chris had been, because there's 10 years between them. So it was quite nice sort of going back with her. And we visited all the gates and took stuff and talked to the women. I mean, by then there was, I'm sure there was caravan up there by then. I mean, they sort of became quite established. I mean, they seemed to go - they went through a phase, particularly '83 when the missiles came in, and over the next couple of years, I think, I think in '85, kind of, or was it '86 - must have been '84, a leap year - there was a leap year when they, they did this, I remember we had this thing - there was this rather strange idea that a lot of women had that they would say, because it was on the Leap Year day they would say women propose that the missiles should go - a bit of an odd idea, but you know. And I can remember us having an event in Cardiff. And there was a woman called Hillary Pickeddy who had been living up there - who spoke, and at that point, there were no tents or anything. No benders, which kind of replaced the tents, so that if they were evicted and taken down they would, they would be able to put the stuff up again. And they were just sleeping out on the ground in February. And raising money for these bivouac bags - those huge

sleeping bags, and that's the way they were living, and that was February '84. But I mean, I think they were constant evictions - people had to be very careful.

Did you witness any?

I didn't witness that any. I mean, Mary, she lived there for 10 years, she arrived in 80... I think early '82. Certainly was around in the organisation for the ringing of the base. And, you know, she recalls events like, there was one where there were evictions and some poor girl who just arrived from abroad - had only just arrived and just lost all her possessions. Because they would just chuck everything away. And there's a lot of film of Sarah Hipperson trying to defend her car, I think, where they were trying to take that away. Um. So it was, it was very difficult for the woman. And they, you know, they really, you know...

Well it's a heck of a commitment.

It was a huge, huge commitment. I think, you know, for some of them, I mean, Mary was there for 10 years and then came to, because that was the other thing I was going to say about going up there - because Mary came to Cardiff and joined Cor Cochion, which is the socialist choir that I'm in, I think that helped keep us in touch with what was going on. And also Ray Davis who was a councillor who was in the choir, he was vice chair of CND in Wales and that, so I think we went up to a lot of events at Greenham where there weren't that many people there even, and perhaps nobody else had travelled up from here, we'd just go up on our own. So there were, there was, there was a, you know, quite a lot of times we went up for fairly small events up there. Because, I mean, it did reach a point where the women weren't in any danger there, but they were still living there.

When was that - I was going to ask you. So the cruise missiles went back?

I mean, the the peace camp stayed there until September 2000. So it was there for 19 years. The caravan was still there. But there wasn't any real need for it to be there. I mean, there wasn't anything going on.

That was when the missiles had left?

That was after they'd left.

How did you feel about that?

About them staying?

Yeah.

Um.

Did you feel there were different Greenhams?

Um. Well, I think the women that were there had been there all the way through. So they'd been there in the difficult times. And had just continued to live there. Um. Sarah, I think was there right to last day. Sarah Hipperson, and there's another woman whose name I've forgotten now, who'd been there all the way through. And of-course, because Mary had lived there for 10 years, she knew them all.

Janice someone...

Yeah, yeah. So I mean, and we, as I say, we still used to visit and we, you know, there would be things like we go up to Greenham, and perhaps go to something that was Burghfield, or I distinctly I'm going to Burghfield.

When would that have been?

I would say, let me think now, the late, definitely the late '90s, because those are definitely you know, thinking about when various children were born that were, that came up with us, I mean, Ray and Wendy's

children are quite small on photos up there. And I mean their youngest was born '95, I think so you're talking maybe '96/'97 that sort of time. We'd still gone up there and then perhaps gone with some of the women from there. Definitely remember going to Burghfield. So, you know, there were other bases around where there was still stuff going on that was dangerous, and missiles being produced, and that so there was always other things to, to focus on in that area.

So you saw the whole range?

Yeah. And I think to be fair to the women who stayed there, even if people thought, well, why are they still there? They were, they were, they were doing peace work all around from there, and it was still a focus in that sense. Um, so we went up, my son Chris and I went up with members of the choir on the last day, and sung up there. And, you know, it was it was a nice event of quite a few women there - we were the only ones from the original march who were actually there, actually, on the first day on the last day.

Did you cry?

Um, no, I don't think I did. I don't think I did. But I have when I've talked about it since! (Laughs). Because it's funny because, you know, when you start talking about the sacrifices the women made, then I get upset because I think, you know, the fact that they did that, and also the fact that a woman was killed there, of-course, because Mary was there when Helen was killed. Um, and that's just awful, really. And she was a young woman of only 23 I think. And she was the inspiration, inspiration really, for Mary to move to Wales and learn Welsh, because she was Welsh speaker. So there was some awful things happen there. So it's when you think of that, that, that the sacrifice the women made, and the fact that Helen was killed. Because quite - she was killed in '89, and there was a little garden um, there, all through the years afterwards with a little stone and flowers that people would put, put on, so she was remembered there, and now she's got, of course, in the Peace Garden up there, there's a big memorial stone. So, you know, she is

remembered, but um, you know that, that and we planted a tree at Temple peace in Cardiff and that, so she, you know, she's remembered. So I mean I, I but I, no I don't think I got upset on the last day, I think it was quite a jovial event, and they took the caravan away and everything and um...

Were the media there?

Yes, I remember being interviewed by Sky News, I think - and a couple of other stations. I never saw any of it. But I do remember being interviewed. I remember them interviewing me and Jean Hutchinson, because, because she was still - that's right, Jean Hutchinson was still there as well as Sarah Hipperson, I remember being interviewed with Jean on Sky News. I say I never actually see any of this coverage, I don't know what it was like, but um yeah.

What did you think of the media coverage of the - of Greenham? Fair representation?

In Wales, it was always good. It was never anything but positive. Always seemed that they were very proud of the fact that the march had started here - I can't remember anything negative. And even on all the interviews I've done, nobody's ever asked me a negative question. Or, you know, nobody's ever asked me any, you know 'Well, what about the deterrent? Or we need these weapons.' - it's never been anything like that. It's always been 'Well, what was it like?', and you know, just admiration for the women that, that, that, that did it really, so. And that was the case right from the beginning, because there was newspaper coverage and stuff in The Echo, and and there's film coverage on HGTV and BBC. In-fact it was funny because I when I did the - Mary and I both did this Real Lives Reunited programme, which went out - we went up in 2014 I think in the summer and it went out in the, in the February I think. And um, we um, I've forgotten what I was gonna say now.

About the media coverage you were getting.

Oh, that's right. They, they showed us, they'd sort of say different things for us. I mean, they had this idea, they interview the four of you, but they keep you separate, so that when you see each other, it's like you're sort of meeting up. So they stick you all in different hotels, and then the next, you know, they try and make sure that you don't meet up, and otherwise I see Mary anyway, but they show - what they showed Mary a photo that she hadn't seen when she was obviously a lot younger when she was living there. But they showed me this film of it setting off and what was on there? Our Plas Clwyd Labour banner which I've still got here. So, because I, you know, I think a lot of people - looking back, a lot of people had already joined the Labour Party, by that time, who were very supportive, because there was the banner on this on this film. And it was all a bit too quick to really recognise anybody, I didn't see myself on it or anything like that. We were always at the back anyway, I never caught much of it. But, but I remember seeing the banner and thinking, oh, great, you know, so I've, you know, I've kind of - and it's funny that we're actually the ones who've got the banner. So um...

How did that contrast with the media representation in the UK press - tabloids and broadsheets?

I think it was a mixture, wasn't it? I mean, I think some of the papers probably like The Guardian were mainly sympathetic, but then there were other ones like, I don't know, the Daily Mail, probably Telegraph and that, that, that were very anti, and that was, you know, they started to give a lot of coverage to the others. That's quite funny in a way and only just really now that sort of occurred to me, but they, they would try and find sort of respectable ladies' groups - because we were women, there would be, you know, well, we'll find some, you know, little group of ladies who didn't seem to barely exist really. And I think there was, there was one woman in particular in Newbury became some sort of spokesperson. But I know that the woman did get quite a lot of hostility in the local area. It was, it was very polarised, very polarised.

On their beliefs about nuclear weapons?

I think so, and then it became a bit of a misogynist thing - probably an anti-lesbian thing, and became, oh, you know, these women and they don't wash, and they just live there in the mud and all the rest of it. And when we went up to do the Real Lives Reunited programme, we went to a cafe there, which I didn't know it, I can't remember what it was called now - The Emperor or some sort, and that was the only cafe that would allow the Greenham women in. And the owner there, she made a cake for this event when we went up, and she made, she made cakes for the 30th anniversary, and there was another event we went up to as the choir in something like 2014, where we had - where the common was being handed over to the council, and the mayor was there in his chains and everything, so we were up there for that. And there was a big cake for that, and they're all made at this cafe, beautiful cakes, you know with Greenham designs on them and everything. But it seems like that was the only cafe that they knew that they'd be allowed in, because, and if they you know they can have a bath there and different things.

At the time when you were at Greenham, a) when you arrived at the end of the march, and then on your other visits, did you have much contact with the local people, residents of the area?

Well there were a lot of Newbury people who supported us on that last day and came on the march. Um. And we were certainly put up by, by family there - I remember we stayed in their caravan in the garden, and John could drive by then. So there were a lot of Newbury people who supported it. And as I say I think it became quite polarised because, you know, there was hostility whipped up as well.

Who was whipping that up?

Presumably local nuclear supporters, and Conservatives mainly I would have thought.

Did you come across RAGE - Ratepayers Against Greenham?

I didn't personally, but now you, now you mention it, I did, I have heard of them. Yeah . Yeah. Yes. I suppose a lot of it, they'd say 'Well, these women you know, they're there, and they're not paying any rates and they staying there.' And I suppose a lot of it was like the hostility you get against gypsies and that, you know, people thinking they can just turn up and, and camp there. I mean, they did end up with a, you know standpipe of water was, was, was put on and everything. But I mean, you can't really say that they were taking up - I mean, all these gates were pretty much in the middle of nowhere. It's not like somebody setting up a camp live in Roath Park opposite here or, or something.

You've got 9 miles - there's a lot of room.

And, and all the camps that that ended up being set up at the various different gates, you can't say there were near people's houses, particularly or intruding on them. I think the Main Gate had houses that weren't that far away. But I mean, I think for every person who was opposed to it, there were people who supported it. And, I mean, if it hadn't been for local people, I don't think it could have, it could have kept going - because there were various people who, people who supported and sent food, and washing facilities, you know where women could go and have a bath. And I think for a lot of the women that lived there, because there were so many of them, it was possible to get some time out from there. I know when Mary was there, she used to um, go back to her flat every couple of weeks and spend a couple of nights, and then come back. So I think there was enough scope for women to be able to be able to do that. But there were some that lived there for, you know, a number of years.

Did you follow um, the different gates as they developed? Were you aware of different personalities for each gate?

I mean, yes and no. I mean, I suppose to certain extent, the ones of us that have been on the original, I think there was a feeling that we didn't want to know, to a certain extent, about all the arguments and disputes that happened - which are inevitable in any movement, and in any

women's movement, and whatever movement you're in or party that - there are going to be some disagreements. So in the beginning, obviously there was the decision that they were going to make it women only, and the men were asked to leave.

What did you think of that?

Um, I think if I had been there, I would have probably thought it was a bit unfair, because I would have known the men who - there were two young men from Cardiff who stayed, um, and so they were amongst the group that were asked to leave. I don't know whether lots of other men arrived. I do see the sense in having that women's focus. Definitely. Um. But I don't know, I don't know that it would have done any harm if they'd been asked to just camp at a different gate, or they could have had one or two gates that were mixed, but most of them women. And I don't know, I don't know about all the debates that raged. I mean, I know generally in the movement, and certainly in Cardiff, again, just reading through stuff that I've written around that time was quite interesting because I've recorded quite a lot of stuff about how there became a bit of a thing, which kind of started I suppose with - when we went, when we when we got to Hyde Park, when we did the bit from Greenham to Hyde Park in the October.

Of '81?

Of '81. I mean, it was wonderful to go back up and do another walk with people, and see people, and see what was happening at Greenham, and the tents and everything. But when we were talking about what to do at Hyde Park, we were going to be the first there - I mean it was a massive demonstration. We were going to be the first there because we were doing our walk, and just gonna walk up there, and then the big demonstration would arrive, and Ann spoke and that. But Helen John wanted us to sit down and refuse to move. And of-course, a lot of us are quite alarmed at this because again, I had Chris with me and I've recorded that I thought, you know, this would be so dangerous, and there would be people trying to get away, and people sitting down. And

what had happened very quickly from it being a long discussion about whether people should chain themselves up, and people thinking, oh no, this isn't what we signed up for, suddenly very quickly it become right, we're going to do a lot of direct action. And there was a lot of stuff around then about different sorts of direct action. And what I've recorded is that it's almost a bit of them and us, like, you know, if you were prepared to take direct action - forget the fact that some woman is perhaps kept that camp going or done stuff locally, and has spent huge amount of time raising people's awareness of the issues and that, somehow the person who's going to go and chop down the fence is more important. Whereas my view would be that we're all important. It's, it's all important and...

You never got through the fence?

Oh, god, no, I never went through the fence. I mean, Mary did, she was one of the ones who - there's, there's a lot, there's photos of some of them sort of dancing on top of the big bunker there, and Mary Millington was there then, a lot of them were sort of dressed in funny costumes and that so you couldn't see who they were. Oh, yeah, I mean Mary went in there loads of times, there were regular forays into the, into the base. And I think that's great that they, that they did that, you know.

Going back to Hyde Park - there wasn't you were against the sit down?

I mean, we didn't do it. I wasn't the only one who thought it was a mad idea. But, but you can see the way things were starting to go, that it wasn't enough - and it's reasonable to think this, that it wasn't enough just to do just to do the marches and all the rest of it. But I mean, there's a place, there's a place for both. I mean, you know, we've had a lot of, obviously, last year, a lot of recollection about the Suffragettes. But, you know, I have been reminded that there was Suffragists as well, who didn't do any of the, the dangerous stuff, and it's all, it's all important, and you could say with the Suffragettes that it was, it was the big actions and, you know, the burning, burning down houses and stuff that had the effect, but I mean, you don't know because there's always an element

that if you do a lot of vandalism or criminal stuff that people are going to say 'Oh, well, they're just a bunch of,' you know, that can work very much against you, so you've got to kind of, you've got to keep a, you've got to keep a balance, really.

Thinking about the Suffragettes, they've had a lot of publicity now - they're in the history books. Why do you think Greenham hasn't had quite that coverage or awareness?

Well, I think it's difficult to say, because for a good few years, I think it kind of did. I mean, it went into sort of folklore and it would be mentioned a lot on the telly and in, I think it's just that because we've moved on again, we are now realising that there are young people who haven't heard of it, which is a bit of a surprise, because it did just become so much part of the sort of folklore, and I think to be fair is better known, perhaps, in parts of Wales, where it started, because there have been there's been a lot of coverage over the years. But I think maybe, I think it has definitely has got its place in history. And I think it will have. And certainly, at the time like that my son was studying sociology in uni, it was in the books. And I think that was a funny experience for a few people - I remember there was a couple of women who went back as mature students. Um. And they, and they, and they were in the book, you know, that they were as part of the social movement and as part of what was being studied. So, so I think it will and...

Maybe it's there at university level or academia....

I think there's still television programs about it, as I say, the Real Life Story Reunited one that I did, there's still documentaries, and I mean, who knows if you have something with, like we have the Suffragettes, I mean, obviously everybody knows about the Suffragettes. But the film Suffragette, I think was, was then important. And you I think we've seen that, particularly with things like the film Pride, um, because obviously, everybody knows about the miners' strike, but they might not have known about that particular element, and it gets it out to a wider

audience. So I think, I think that period in history is very interesting. And I think it often happens that you get a gap, and then there's a period of history that becomes particularly one worth looking back at, and I think the '80s are very much sort of topical at the moment.

Well things are quite fractured at the moment aren't they?

Yeah. Yeah. But it's, yeah, it's funny having having, you know, done the whole Greenham thing because it still has a lot of credence amongst the peace movement, but I suppose a lot of those people are getting older, you know. I mean if ever I'm sort of introduced, I mean, obviously I do stuff, I'm a representative from Cardiff Council on the nuclear free local authorities, for example, and I, and I've sort of chaired - still chair meetings on peace, and stuff to do with that. If ever, I'm introduced, as you know, as Sue Lent, you know, she's Cardiff councillor, but she's also was always one of the original women - it's always, you know, great, clap, clap, clap. Because it's, you know, I think it still has, has that sort of resonance, really, that that about what people think of the Greenham woman, I mean, I went up to the CND, CND 60th anniversary event in London, which was, in my capacity as a representative on the nuclear free local authorities. But I had a chat with Bruce Kent up there, and he said, he said 'Wherever I went to the world', he said, 'People always asked me how are the Greenham woman?' Yeah, and he was - I was chatting to him for a while and you know, another friend of ours who was there said 'Sue was one of the original Greenham women', and yeah, that's what he said - they always asked how are the Greenham women - so they, the sort of, their notoriety or whatever you want to call it was worldwide, it wasn't, it wasn't just in Britain, and you really noticed that if ever you went to that - particularly if you went up there obviously the big events, you'd have people from all over the place. But when I visited on quieter occasions, there was always people from all over, all over the place there visiting, and they'd come and stay for a few days from various places abroad. So, and I suppose again, going back to whether the men should have been asked to leave - I think the fact that it was a women's camp did have, did make a difference, and I suppose because it was the first one this, you know, this time round or whatever -

I mean, a lot of lot of the stuff we did of-course had been done in the, you know, the '50s and '60s and that, but...

What do you think the impact of Greenham was on feminism in this country?

Um, I think for a lot of women in politics, it gave them more confidence, and it definitely did with me, because those of us - we had a large women's peace group in Cardiff after Greenham, which got bigger and bigger, and we had a march to Brawdy in '82.

Brawdy is where?

Brawdy is in West Wales, and it's a base down there. So we had the march down to RAF Brawdy. There were star marches to Greenham in '83, and we, so we did that, that march as well. Um. But what, what tended to happen is in the big group here, we were always being asked to speak things - always. And I mean, I can remember speaking at a big meeting at the end of a demonstration, when, when Grenada was invaded. I think that was at '83 or something. I made this beautiful banner which I never saw again that went to the front of the march where we took - because there were these badges with 'Hands off Grenada' on, and they had like a sun on a sort of palm, and I cut out all this stuff in felt and sewed it on (laughs), and it was - but I remember speaking at the Temple of Peace to a huge crowd. Well, I was I mean this is gonna sound daft - people laugh when I say this, but I was always quite shy really. I mean, I was a very quiet child. Um. And certainly didn't you know kind of push myself forward. I mean, very quiet at university - got, got political towards the end of the time I was there, and started becoming a bit more, you know, certainly interested in feminism and that, but I wasn't brought up in what I would call a political family or anything. Unlike most of the people in South Wales who always, quote their mothers and grandmothers and everything, that doesn't apply to me. And so, you know...

Would you call that empowerment? I mean that's the word these days?

It was it was, yeah, no, I mean, definitely, there were other things going on - as I say, I got involved in women's groups and that, but, but I think a lot of the Greenham women found themselves thrust out there where you had to speak, you had to go to meetings and talk about what was happening there. And, and you kind of just had to do it really, because it would be like, well, who can do this? And who can do that one?

Because there was so many requests, really. And I'm not sure that I would have had the confidence to stand for the council if I hadn't been through that. I definitely think it was a spur on that. And I know a lot of the other Greenham women have said it spurred them on to do other things like, become more involved in their local communities, even just things like becoming a school governor or setting up other groups. And I think it made us realise that you can start from something small and achieve something big, and I'll often quote it with people and say, often it's the small things - you don't know at the time, you can slog away at various things and think you've not achieved anything, and maybe sometimes you do put in a lot of effort and it doesn't get you very far. But, but other times you can just do something that, that just resonates, you know. Um. I mean, I mean, I'm, I'm sort of involved in in other things to do with with feminism at the moment that I see as important where, to be honest, we're getting quite a battering over some issues. Um, and sometimes I don't feel that confident, but then I think a lot of us older women think well, you know, we've, we've been through all these struggles, you know, not just obviously on Greenham and the nuclear stuff but on you know, women's issues I suppose - fought all the struggles for, for childcare and um...

Living your life?

Yeah, and just women's rights at work and that, and I mean, what struck me when I went up to the 30th anniversary at Greenham, 'cause some of the - about nine of us choir women went up for the, for the 30th anniversary and there was quite a nice events up there, you know, quite big and of-course the common is open now, and we went into this hall, and Ann Pettitt was supposed to be going up and speaking, and then

couldn't come, and I was - somebody came and asked me would I speak, because they knew I'd been - obviously on the original march. So I didn't have any time for prepare, to prepare, which sometimes is a good thing really. And when I spoke it just so struck me because I said - I mean I it was almost like I hadn't expected myself particularly to say this, but I said 'It was so very different for women 30 years ago, and you mustn't forget that, because a lot of the things that women have gained are taken for granted.' I said 'You know, when I came on the original Greenham march, I had a 1 year old baby, I had no right to part time work, I had to give up my job, really when I had him, because although I could have taken - well, I hadn't done enough, you had to have 2 years, and they were very strict on it. I hadn't quite done the 2 years.' But I said 'I wouldn't have been able to go back, because I couldn't access part time work. I mean, I was a social worker. So you know, it's quite a demanding job, obviously. So we didn't and I can remember when we didn't have equal pay, and the Sex Discrimination Act coming in, and the Equal Pay Act, and they hadn't been in very long then. And women were treated differently, um and lots of things that young women tend to take more for granted, particularly with employment, and being able to take - well now a whole year off work and go, have a right to, to ask for part time just wasn't, you know, wasn't an option. Er. So, and I think the way we women were treated and you know, this is still a great under representation of women in, in politics. But it has changed a lot. I mean, when I was first on the council in '89, on the Old South Glamorgan, in the Labour group, I think there was, I think it was I think there was seven women out of about forty six people and nobody really thought much of it. I mean, you know, it's not perfect now, I think we're about a third women, and Wales does tend to lag behind quite a bit, and some parts of Wales lag behind more than others - in terms of the number of women at representation level, you know, counsellors, MPs, etc. But it's still a big improvement and at least people do recognise that there should be equal representation. I mean, then it wasn't you know, people didn't really, didn't really think about it. And, and also, I think some of the people that did think about it probably thought it wasn't very ladylike to be involved in politics, because of the macho of style of politics. And that's always a difficult one really, you know, people say 'I don't know

how you can be involved in all that', like, as if it's sort of dirty or something. But, you know, if we're not involved in political life, and stand for council and as MPs and that, somebody else is going to fill the gap who, who hasn't got as much principle, or isn't prepared to fight for different things. So it's um...

So Greenham had an impact?

Yeah, and I would say even more so on some of the other women who genuinely haven't been involved in anything else, who really had just come to it as being I'm really worried about my children and the future. Impacted in different ways, I mean, somebody like Helen John, I say dedicated their whole life to peace. And became well known and spoke a lot, you know, at lots of events, and did a lot. But just such a small level, I think if you got a lot of those women together, and the women who've gone up to Greenham over the years, I think so many would would say that it has spurred them on to do, to do other things. I mean, I mean, locally, obviously, I'm not saying that that Greenham did this, but there are an awful lot of women who were involved in Greenham who've gone on, I mean, Jane Hutt, who is a cabinet member in the assembly and has been virtually a cabinet member right from its inception. She spoke before the original march set off, she was a South Glamorgan councillor, before Julie and then myself, I think when she, when she was first a councillor, there was probably only about two women on the, on the council, because she was a councillor from '81, Julie from '85. Julie went on to be an MP, Julie Morgan and is now an AM. I came in at '89. Um, there's any number of women, and some of them have sort of seemed to have slipped back a bit, or have changed their position a little bit. But even women like Glynis Kinnock, she spent a lot of time going down to Greenham, there were an awful lot of women who went into, who were either already in political life but went on to do more, you know, when, say, like Jane was a councillor, but went on to be an assembly member, it was, you know, I think it did spur people on, and it did give us a certain amount of confidence, definitely.

What do you think Greenham's biggest achievement was? What's the sort of legacy of Greenham?

I think that, that, that women can, I think that that small numbers can make a big difference, and that you should always try, and that you've, you've got different contributions to, to make. You know, I've known a lot of older people who've got - that they can barely go out of the house, but they do a lot of writing to the papers, and writing to their MPs, and everything is really important. But I think the fact that from small beginnings, a lot can be achieved. We did achieve the cruise missiles going, I mean, we also politicised a lot of people about the nuclear threat, and about nuclear weapons, about nuclear power. So it had a huge impact on raising people's awareness. But I think the other thing that it shows is that people will, if you know, it's an example of people sticking by their principles and spending literally years and years of their lives up there, because I think, to do that, you know, women did sacrifice an awful lot. I mean, a lot of political activity, people say 'Oh, you know, you're very good doing this.' But most of it is pretty enjoyable, or you wouldn't do it. I mean, a lot of stuff in the Labour Party, obviously, I'm sure people know can be quite tedious. And also, there can be acrimony and all the rest of it, but generally, you know, I think people wouldn't - don't do things if they really hate them. There's got to be something. And I'm not - and I'm sure for a lot of women that lived up there, I'm not saying they didn't enjoy it, because obviously there's that camaraderie, meeting other people and that. But when it comes down to it, it's pretty, pretty much hardship that - having to just live, live out in a sleeping bag, or I think for, for the women there, their days were spent literally keeping the fire going, collecting wood, getting water, cooking, keeping warm. And that, I think that's that's very hard, and that, and I think that's a real example to, to people that that they gave up so much, and went through such privations.

And if they tried to do that sort of off site, so to speak, not by living at Greenham, do you think they would have had a different impact?

I think, I think the thing is it gave a focus, because there were always people coming from everywhere. And it really, really gave that focus. And I think that's important, because it was sort of like a permanent focus. And I know there are, I mean, like we were very active in Cardiff. We had a peace shop and a cafe. I think lots of places did - where you could go and find out stuff and that, but Greenham became so well known as a sort of national and international place for people to go, that I think it really, really sort of resonated it. Um. Yeah, I mean, it would be nice to think there would be some sort of revival, or something that would spur the memory for people. I mean, yeah.

I was gonna ask you, because obviously, you're taking part in this project, which is going to go into the women's library, LSE and researchers can use it. What are other things do you think could be done to raise the awareness of Greenham common, the role that women played?

I think, I think if a film of or anything like that ever gets made, that, that would be - go more into the sort, out of this sort of more political bubble, I think that was making a difference. But we've also had - I say in Wales last year, there was a project run by the Wales women, run by the Wales Women's Archive that, that was running all year, um partly to commemorate 100 years since the Suffragettes but it was kind of a year of women in, I forget how it was framed, I don't know if it was in protest or can't remember the exact wording but that ran all year. And we had an event to you know, to celebrate Greenham at the end of August, and they were running stuff all year, and there were quite a lot of people got involved in those, and quite a lot of publicity um, in terms of, of what was happening, and a lot of recording done of women who were there. I mean, there were a few of us managed to get, get to that to which was sort of in Cardiff, and Chepstow. I know Ann Pettitt and Karmen Thomas came down. The three of us spoke, there were other women who obviously who'd been involved with Greenham, there were other women in Chepstow who supported the original march.

So there are lots of things happening?

So there are, there are things, there are things going on.

Did you walk part of the route again from Cardiff to Newport - did I see something?

Yeah, we yeah, what we did is, we, it was the was the Bank Holiday Monday which fell on the 27th, which was the day the march set off. So we sort of met, well we kind of met behind County Hall - City Hall, because there was a lot going on at the front, because they'd just had the Big Weekend and they were clearing all that out. So we met in the um, in Alexander Gardens behind there, and we have speeches from the bandstands and you know, a bit of singing. There wasn't really time to do a lot of walking. But we did sort of walk a little bit into town and back, and then we got - a lot of us then went on to Chepstow in the bus, and there was another meeting in Chepstow. And what we did there was we walked along the Severn Bridge to about halfway, you know, because we'd obviously walked there. All those years ago. Yeah, it wasn't as windy then as it was. I mean, when we walked across originally, we walked across quite early in the morning, because the police had told us that we had to be at the bridge by 9, or something and um, or they wouldn't be able to escort us. So we got there for 9, and they didn't come anyway. (Laughs). So I think it was earlier in the morning, whereas this one was, it wasn't a particularly nice day though this time around, but I don't think it was particularly windy. But there was quite a large group of us walked to the middle, and we got a lot of people hooting us and cheering. We had a lot of banners, which was what it was like when we first went over - lots of support.

On a more personal level, do you talk about it to children a lot, or do they ask you about it?

Oh, god, yeah. Well, I mean, Chris. (Coughs). Excuse me. Chris has done interviews a bit himself as sort of the Greenham baby really, I suppose who was on it. He's very proud of it. Um. And people know that, that he was on, on it originally. And he, he's, because he's a

member of the choir as well with me. He has been up to a lot of the stuff going on up there. He was up there for the last day of the peace camp with me. And he's, yeah, he's known about it um, sort of all the way, all the way through really. My son Tom, who is my other son, he's, he's autistic, so he's probably a bit less aware, but, but he doesn't know, you know, you can tell he - I mean, he does know all about it, and and also he did come to the Cardiff part of the event last August. My daughter Rachel is a bit ambivalent about a lot of, a lot of, a lot of stuff. She's, she's very much a feminist, and she's a member of the Labour Party, but not not an active one. I think she's more...

Does she define feminism in the same way as you?

Yeah, I think so. Yes, I think so. I think so. And I think you know, she's proud that I, that I was up there. It doesn't mean as much as it does to Chris, I suppose, because he's older, and because he was, he knows he was there on on the original thing. And when we, when we had an unveiling of the um, we had a plaque in the Temple of Peace for the 20th anniversary, him and Becky who was the other youngest one there, unveiled the plaque, and stuff like that. So he's been very much kept into that kind of loop. In fact, we were just saying because, sadly, Paul Flynn, of course, died a couple of days back. And I know Chris put it on Facebook saying, he remembers Paul Flynn saying to him 'Oh, you were the Greenham baby,' so people, you know, they do they do ask because obviously they knew I had a baby there. So they know what's happened to him, whereas Rachel being younger...

What's her ambivalence about it?

Oh, I think anything your parents do, she's still a bit in that, you know, that it's kind of er, you, I mean, I might be being a bit unfair to actually - I mean, she certainly supports it.

How old is she?

She's 28. She's got the same, you know, her political views are, as I say she's not active in the Labour Party. I think she's, she's less inclined to want to be than Chris would be, although she is a member, so she's not got involved. I mean, like, I see some of the Labour Party women turn up to things with their daughters and, er, they're sort of following the same path. I mean, Rachel hasn't got that interest in the Labour Party. I mean, I tried to persuade her to come to the Welsh Labour Women's conference, which was in Swansea, where she lives and, and a few of us stayed with her. But you know, and she could have come easily, but she didn't want to, but having said that, I mean, she's a teacher, and she's very, very busy. And I don't think she's got the space for anything much else, but she does support everything, I mean, she's definitely got the same politics, the same outlook, and she's definitely a feminist. And I think she does have that understanding that it hasn't always been easy for women, and will point out to women, you know, that other women fought in the past. I think she's got a much more of a historical view - when when she was at uni, she did English, but she did do feminist novels, and sort of more historical feminist writings and that, so um she's definitely got that historical view, which I do sometimes think that a lot, some of the younger feminists now haven't got, you know, they think it's just started with them, and that certain things have always been there and they haven't - they don't realise what people have fought for. And I think, I think also amongst some, some younger women, depending on their views on certain things, they can be quite disrespectful to some of the older feminists on one or two issues where they don't agree, instead of having a more respectful discussion and thinking, well, these women have gone through a lot and they're older, are quite, can be quite disrespectful even though they consider themselves feminists. Well, I think if you're a feminist you shouldn't be disrespectful. We shouldn't be respectful anyway, but to call yourself a feminist, and then disrespect women who have gone through years and years of different struggles is just awful, really.

I read something by a lady who'd been a member of END, and ended up going to Greenham, and she felt the same then in the early '80s, that

feminism had only just been discovered, the peace movement had only just been discovered, and it really annoyed her.

I can understand that. I can understand that. I mean, to be honest, I think one of the things that was good about Greenham in the original march, and that, was that we had so many women who were then in their 60s. You know, so we're talking about women who were born in like, I mean, Mary, I think was born in 1917. You know, there were, there were so - that, you know, certainly, I think for my generation, there was such a big gap between what it was like for our mothers, and us, that really women should have known better - the younger women if they really thought they'd just invented it, because, I mean, my mother wasn't a socialist, um, she wasn't particularly pleased when I was, you know, joined the Labour Party, and all the rest of it, and there was a lot of my politics she didn't agree with. But I would still say she was a feminist. Because, you know, she really saw the injustice for girls that - from when she was younger, you know. Um, and well obviously for poorer people, but I mean, neither of my parents had a well off upbringing. Both had to leave school at 16 despite both getting scholarships for grammar school and doing well, both went back in their 40s to train as teachers, and I was always very conscious that I went to university and you know, they weren't able to (becomes upset). Sorry! (Laughs).

Don't you'll set me off! It's a very similar story to my parents.

And I can remember talking, I did an interview, um, I think around the 30th anniversary with a younger woman who was actually a Lib Dem and she was talking about the Slut March and they were comparing it with Greenham and different things that happened, and it was quite a long interview, and I found myself you know, saying about how it was for women before as and historically and that. But when I got back, John, we listened to it back, and John, my ex-husband listened to it, and he got really upset because his grandmother was, was, had this scholarship, and should have gone to grammar school and because she was a girl didn't go, and that was his grandmother who was born in the 1890s, you know, and that's - because there was that sense of injustice.

And I one thing I do remember saying as well about my age group, when we went to university, it was mostly, you know, there was still two thirds boys, and the prospectuses would openly say different grades for boys and girls. You know, if you're a boy, you have to have this, but if you're a girl you had to have higher grades to get in. So, you know, I think a lot of that sort of thing has been, but I was certainly very conscious of the difference between my age group and my parents age group, and just, just how different it was for our generation in terms of women than it was, than it was for them really, and you know I just think you should should try to always have that kind of historical view.

At Greenham were there disputes between women about what feminism was - how it should be enacted?

I, I wouldn't like to say much about that because, because I wasn't living there - I know there was various rankles about, about obviously when when the men went, but after that, I know there were disputes but I don't really know the ins and outs of what they were about.

Only reason I ask I read an old Spare Rib.

Oh, yeah, I used to get that, yeah.

And I can't remember the name of the journalist, but she went to the Embrace the Base thing, and she was a bit sniffy. Didn't think that it was hard enough, and too much emphasis on the maternal. And...

Well, that's an interesting one, again.

No way to fight this fight.

I think, I think there's always - within feminism - been this thing about, and in politics, I suppose in socialist politics about, you know, whether you can have feminism without socialism and that, which I would say you can't. So I think, broadly, the peace movement has tended to be socialist, but I think you can get into those sort of disagreements, where

it's, it's how much emphasis you give to women's stuff. Um. You know, there's the whole arguments about positive action for women, and all the rest of it. The maternal thing is, is really interesting, because when I was at university, I mean, I always wanted children, whatever, but I knew I wanted children, but I do remember women at university seeing that as something that wasn't for them because really, they wanted to be more like men. And I can remember - I did philosophy and English, and I can remember being at our philosophy professor's party - he used to have these, host these little parties - and being there, and one of the women there saying 'Well in the future, you know, it would be possible for wombs to be created, and babies to be born without women having to have babies and that', and saying to her 'Well, it's a privilege to be able to bear a child, you know, that men don't have. I want to be pregnant, you know', not now maybe. But yeah. So there were those sorts of discussions really. And there were women who decided not to have children, and saw that as a feminist thing to do. So when I had Chris, I didn't know um, I was sort of quite isolated in a way, because a lot of - I obviously I did know women with children, but there were also a lot of women that I knew hadn't got children. So for me, that was such an important bit of Greenham was the fact that we, we got, you know, so many women with children, and that, and that, that was you know, that was that that was okay to be a feminist and be concerned. And, and to bear children and for that to be very much. I mean, obviously there again, there are issues that are coming up now that are going against biological definitions of women, um, which are I feel sort of threatening all that, to a certain extent, you know, and there are young feminists who call themselves feminists who don't think that being a woman has anything to do with our biology. So not wanting to get into that. I, I do think that, that was it was a good time for us as feminists and that we were exploring our bodies. We were talking about pregnancy, we were talking about childbirth, we were talking about the menopause. Everything that, that is about women's lives, really, and that that was really important as well.

Any other memories you'd like to share, before we finish?

Um...

We've covered a lot, I think actually have a lot yeah.

There's a lot of...

Do you still fear a nuclear holocaust?

I suppose I'd be stupid to say no, because it - and I'm still involved as I'm involved in nuclear free authorities, I still go to CND events. And we still do a lot in the choir to do with nuclear things. But I'm not as scared. I still think it's a threat. And I think it will continue to be a threat, and I think nuclear power is a threat, and I am worried about climate change. But I, I do remember the immediacy of it then, thinking god I had this child, and I'm going to have more children, and what world am I bringing them into? And at the moment, I don't feel that so much. It might change if I had a grandchild. I don't know yet! Because I mean, that can, it can sort of bring that back really, you know, thinking well, you know, if one of my children had a grandchild, and then in a few years time, you know, I would be thinking, well, god by the time they're old, what will the world will look like? I think it's become more about, well not more about, but it's become about climate change as well as sort of any kind of nuclear kind of um threat. So it's um, yeah.

So no sleepless nights?

Not particularly about that - other aspects of politics maybe, but no, I don't lie awake thinking the world's gonna, gonna blow up. Although, I mean, obviously the world is an extremely dangerous place. But I think if you dwell on that too much, that is going to paralyse, you're not going to do anything - you've got to keep a balance between - I think this is what happens in politics all the time, on other issues as well, that you have one day when you think you're getting somewhere, and another day when you think, why am I bothering doing any of this? I'll give it all up, you know, particularly I find out particularly as I'm getting older, I think, well, do I want to spend the rest of my life doing this? Or do I

want to, you know, obviously, older people, I mean, I'm still a councillor, so although I'm retired from my social work job, obviously I'm still pretty busy. But if I wasn't a councillor, I think I would probably, in some ways get more involved in some of the political stuff. But then I am, I'm in a socialist choir that sings on the streets twice a week, you know, so that in itself is a big, a big commitment. Um. So I think I'll always be, you know, be involved in, in politics, but you do have days where you think, what is the point - on a number of issues, really, I think. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I think it's hard when, when there is sort of infighting and kind of um, you know, politics can be quite nasty kind of world - party politics can be, you know, but, but other politics can be as well, and people don't always kind of, you know, show enough understanding of each other, I don't think - I mean, me included, probably, I mean, I'm very outspoken but yeah, it can be not a nice kind of world. But then again, it can be a very nice world in terms of fighting for a common cause and all this, and I still think with Greenham that the reason the women stayed was that we'd spent 10 days together, that had a huge, a huge effect, that we'd spent that time together. And we didn't want to just leave each other and go back to how it was before the 10 days. It was that personal thing had been created as well. And still, if I see anybody who was around originally on that, there's a bond. I mean, I haven't seen Ann or Karmen for ages, but then you see them and it's like, you know, it's important that you did that thing together. You know, very important.

Well here's to Greenham women, and thank you very much.