

Oak Chezar

So I live in, kind of in a tree house up a mountain, and I'm off grid. So my system is pretty funky for getting on internet. And I might have to bail on the video and just talk through the audio, or else it gets unstable. So is that cool with you?

Absolutely fine. Yeah, no problem at all. I have very much enjoyed reading your book. It's yeah, been fantastic. Very different from other Greenham books that I've read. Really kind of, I mean, obviously, I'm aware of the horror of it, and why the women were there. But you really get that across. You're reading it, well I was reading bits of it and just, yeah, it's horrible, but in a good way. Because you got across the horror of it. But also, yeah, very poetic. And I think you just like, cover all of the different areas of it. It's jam packed, isn't it?

It felt like that to me. For three years, it felt pretty jam packed.

Yeah, definitely. How did it feel? Did it like, going over it all, like, was it casting your mind back and trying to remember everything? Or do you feel like you've always kind of carried all of those memories at the forefront of your mind over the years?

Yeah, that's a good question. You know, I carried lots of things. I physically carried a big suitcase full of every newsletter and photograph and all the sheet music that Rebecca Johnson helped me figure out so that I could remember all the songs and, and journals 1000s of pages that, you know, you can't really write in the rain. I never, as a writer that never occurred to me before, so lots of smudged and rumped pages of journals. But but I also carried it in my body. I mean, I because of the zapping I think I carried it in my body and because of the trauma, I carried it in my body. But because of the glory it was, I don't know if I got the gloriousness across in my writing, but it - Greenham changed my life forever. It made me who I am, it was the most singular powerful thing that ever happened.

You definitely get that across, that kind of the last sentence I think in your book, 'You changed the trajectory of my life forever. You gave me the courage to stand up to this madness, shining memories of you thrill me still.' So you definitely, yeah, you really got that across, er the impact that it's had on you definitely.

And so I had been carrying all these elements. And then I had a lover who was developing publishing software, self publishing software for a big company called Ingram. It's the biggest, it's now I think, the biggest publisher in the world. So she asked me, because I'm an editor and a writer, and an English major and all that, if I would help develop the software. And they actually - I don't know anything about technology, but I just went in as an idiot that doesn't know anything, and got to stumble through the programme, which is what they wanted. They wanted an idiot, who who could speak to her confusion. And so anyway, I put the Greenham book together. And they actually paid me to do that, which was amazing. And I don't think I would

have I don't know what would have made me finally do it because I - it's really hard for me to start things. I was in a women's performance group for 25 years and I did so many pieces about Greenham, from my journals, and from my poems and from all the memories, but I wanted something more, you know, I wanted - and I teach it, I teach Greenham. I teach Women's Studies and so I always teach a whole week on women's lands. And I started off with

I'm glad somebody's teaching it!

Yes, well, not enough, though. Not enough. It's it's all going away. We're all becoming artefacts. I feel like I'm in a museum somewhere. Or I am a museum sometimes.

It's, it's so important to preserve it all. But, it's amazing to preserve it all. And we're doing something towards that. But it's also the frustration that you come across, well, I don't know if you come across it as well, the amount of people who don't know about Greenham.

Oh nobody in this country knows about it. It's so rare to find someone that ever heard of it. I stumbled upon it quite by chance. I didn't know about it either, except that I was in the peace movement. And I was doing all this anti-nuclear work and I heard about women's peace camps in Europe and that's why I went. Reagan got elected again and I left. And I went to Europe and stayed there for five years and and Greenham was the, you know, most of that. The lion's share of that five years was at the camp.

What got you into activism in the first place? What made you an activist?

Oh, boy, I, you know, I have five planets in Libra. And I think there's something about a longing for justice that is so strong in me that manifested as anger and rage for a really long time. But then I learned that anger is a longing for justice. And so - and I was a junkie. I grew up in New York City and by the time I was 17, I was a drug addict. And I was always so unhappy, so unhappy and I didn't know why. But I just kept fucking boys and doing drugs. And then I somehow met an activist when I moved to Colorado, and she told me about Rocky Flats - do you know what Rocky Flats is?

I've heard about it but I don't know much about it.

It's a terrible, it's a, it was the factory that made the the plutonium triggers for every nuclear bomb in the US arsenal, which is a lot. And, and it was a terrible place of just awful pollution and lies and secrecy. Anyway, it's eight miles from the town I live in now. So I just got involved with learning about nuclear war. And I think I realised that my whole life we've been in this terrible danger. And I, I didn't know what it was, you know, maybe I blame my father. Or maybe I blame the fact that I hated living in New York City. And, but it was really I think, underneath it all was this, this knowing that we were so close to killing everything. And once I figured that out, I quit doing drugs, I became a

lesbian and I just got really, really into being an activist and trying to save the world - which, that's a whole long story. But that's what got me into it when I was about 21 years old. And then when I was 27, I went to Greenham.

Yeah, so, so you said somebody told you about women's peace camps in Europe? And that's what led you?

Yes.

Did you go straight to Greenham? Did you go to other places in Europe first?

I went yeah, I did. I went to Sicily, and to Amsterdam, and to Switzerland. And to somewhere in gosh, there was one more oh, someplace in Germany Mulfingen, and I think it was called Mulfingen was in Germany. Anyway, it was all peace camps. And I just kept hearing about Greenham and Greenham and being sort of the mothership. And I thought, well, I don't speak any of these other languages. And I want to go to the mothership - take me to the mothership! So I went to Greenham. And that was it for me.

What was your first impression when you arrived at Greenham?

Oh, boy, everybody was so unfriendly. My first impression, I think, is that I'm a person that wants to hug everybody. And I've always just been this little dancing, hugging goofball. And in, in the US, it's kind of a more hugging culture. But in, I think, at Greenham - I think it was the weather was part of it. Like it was cold, it was raining. Nobody wanted to hug me, I was a total stranger. And I wrote everything down and people thought I was a spy. For the longest time, it was really hard to win trust. But my very first, my very first sense of Greenham was that I hitched a ride and somebody, a woman, let me off at Blue Gate, and Blue Gate was just so wretched, and so filthy. And so, it was just after an eviction and everybody was so downtrodden and dispirited and the rain and I just thought, what the hell am I doing here? And then I went to Yellow Gate and I stayed there because Blue Gate scared me so bad. After a few years, I went back and lived at Blue Gate, but I mostly was at Yellow Gate for the first few years.

Yeah.

Yeah. And that's where people knew more I think about weapons and about war. I felt like a lot of the camp was a party and like a lesbian meet-up - which was wonderful, but it wasn't what I went for. Although I loved being surrounded by women and I did get hugs eventually and warmed up to it all but um, but yeah, I just read Stephanie Davies' book have you read her book?

It's so good, isn't it?

It's so good. And I think she was there a little before I was because I heard about those Aldermaston radiation, the women that got radiated at

Aldermaston and reading her book, I was like, yeah, there were so many women who went there to be with lesbians who didn't go there to stop nuclear war. And I remember at one point, she said, 'Oh, I wouldn't go to Yellow because they were so serious, and all the Americans were there.' And, and they, and it was it was a lot more serious. And I don't have a whole lot of rigour in my heart. But I did go there to stop, like a war. And so yeah, it was different. It was a different experience for me.

Your comment at one point did make me laugh - you said that you were a germaphobe? How did that, how did you cope with being at Greenham and being a germaphobe?

I think I was just very traumatised, and I, also I'm really good at dissociating. And I think I dissociated from you know, the dirty cups and the dogs licking out the pots and just tripping over the same teabag and then making a cup of tea with it. You just get used to it. And, and I've lived like that, more or less ever since. I really dropped a lot of germophobia at Greenham because I had to.

You had to, you had no choice! You talk about a lot, and you've mentioned it already today, the fact that you, you wrote all time. You always had a pen and paper and you talk in different points of your book about when you'd go on any action, making sure that you'd got a piece of paper and a pen in your sock or something in case you got arrested. Yeah, how important, why was that so important to you throughout Greenham and I'm assuming your life?

Oh, the writing. Why was the writing important?

Yeah.

Oh, it kept me sane. You know, I'm an only child. And I think I've always written diaries and journals and made up stories to have company. So it's a way of soothing myself. And it's a way of feeling connected. Like maybe this will, you know when I was locked up in that action at Welford, that kind of the book is kind of framed by, it was so scary. And it was so and I was in so much pain with my ribs. And writing was just the most wonderful thing, because there was an idea that somebody is going to read this someday, and I'm not going to die in this fucking cell alone for nothing. So yeah, so that was important. And I had been arrested before I had been arrested four, three or four times in the States for peace before I left. And so I knew about the importance of having a lot of time on my hands in a jail cell. But in America, you can't bring a pen and a piece of paper into a jail cell, you can't bring anything. But in England, they were very kind and they let me bring my paper and pen until, until I lost it and then had to steal another one. But yeah.

Yeah. As, you write about how you you kind of sneaked one off the table from from one of the police officers. But then the other police officer offered his to you as well.

Yes, the detective. Oh, man he was a creepy guy. Yeah, that was a kind gesture I thought for a creepy guy.

Yeah. You get across the the brutality of a lot of the police but the fact that they are, I suppose a group of people like anyone else where there is, you know, some some good ones in there. And you talked about one of the police officers in, in Newbury jail as well. Who was - was it Beverly, who was quite kind?

Beverly! Beverly was so kind, she really was I don't know what she was doing in there. But she was making me happy. Yeah, yeah, little things like that can really make all the difference when you're terrified and hurt. Yeah, so yeah.

If only people would realise that that's what makes a difference, being kind rather than dropping bombs.

Yes. And it's so different here. Like in the States, cops are just so brutal. And I don't think they're allowed to be cops unless they're willing to kill somebody and be totally brutal and, and you can't, you can't have any - it was just a really different situation than what I was used to as far as being arrested. And going to trial, and being able to speak in my own defence. You couldn't do that in the US you, you got shut down at every, at every turn. You couldn't defend yourself for protesting nuclear war in any way. So it's really good to be there and see, oh, this is a civilised country.

Was that your whole experience of the police over here then - that it was civilised?

Well, it was more civilised. You know, the the people that mostly hurt me were the American soldiers. They actually beat me twice and broke my ribs. The cops, you know, the squaddies at Greenham were just sweet young boys. And I think there were a few scary ones. Stephanie had a scary story for sure.

Yeah.

But it felt like that, you know, they were the lads and the lads were just, lads will be lads, you know. Like they weren't evil and they weren't in charge of, of patriarchy like they are here. They weren't the guardians of of white supremacy and patriarchy. Yeah.

Yeah. It was terrifying reading about the, the American soldiers who did assault you when, when you were caught, was it at Welford or at Greenham? And a soldier who when he spotted you, screaming and holding his gun at you. And just the violence, not just in his actions, but in his, in the way he was screaming and his words, like screaming to his colleagues, I suppose. You know, peace bitches, and he knew who you were, he knew you weren't going to have weapons and things. And I just thought it was such, not just a terrifying way for him to behave, but a very bizarre way to behave towards people who clearly aren't going to hurt you.

I know it was very scary. And I think he was scared too like, I think, you know how you sometimes you get a dog who's really aggressive, but they're fear aggressive? Like they're aggressive because they're scared. I felt like that guy was like one of those dogs like he had just been, he was a young, black dude. And I think he was just terrified of who knows what, every single thing around him probably. And there we were. And we were easy targets. I don't, I don't think they were usually that brutal. But that was a scary thing for everybody. Yeah.

So do, your experiences with the police, were quite different. So yes, you felt that they were kind of young and following orders, but not not as terrifying. You talked about after the bombing of Libya that you felt a change in the police that they seemed scared that night, that maybe they'd realised the danger that they're in as well.

Right. I think and also, you know, they were being zapped all the time, whenever they came to Greenham and the zapping got higher and higher. It just increased every time there was an action. And they were caught in it as well as us and so that - and we would try to talk to them about it like, 'Do you feel sick right now? Is your vision breaking up at the edges? Are you, have a ringing in your ears?' You know, it's really it was really hard to get those guys to connect. Those police, oh, those police were the scariest of all, I think because yeah, they were just, they just wanted to hurt us. Every time the convoy was running. And so when the convoy came out after the bombing of Libya, yeah, it really felt like they, something was getting through to them. Something was changing. Like they were defending nuclear weapons on the cusp of what could have been a nuclear war. And so sure, maybe it was getting through to them. It felt like it was it really did. It felt different.

For people listening to the interview, if they, you know, weren't at Greenham or they've not heard about this before - could you just explain zapping and exactly what that was?

Oh, yeah, sure. Zapping was a microwave driven blast of radiation that was used for crowd control. And it was developed during Vietnam in the 60s, the Russians developed it. The Americans realised they were developing it and they developed it right next to them, alongside of them to use it against them, to use as a weapon of war, but really to use it as a weapon of crowd control. So when I lived at Greenham, it was during the apartheid struggles, and there was a non-stop picket demonstration at the South African Embassy in London. And they used it there. They used it against the IRA, and they used it against civil rights protesters as well and they were developing it the whole time it was this total secret weapon. We would wake up feeling really terrified. We would wake up with scary thoughts in our minds, or we would all have to poop at the same time everybody would run for the shit pit. At the same time that never - that was not usual, that, that would happen. Women would get pain in their bodies or pain, their periods would stop, or their periods would never stop. There was a woman, I remember she was in her

70s. And she had been postmenopausal for years. And when she came to Greenham, she started to bleed again. And, and so one of the scariest things was waking up and being paralysed. And that happened to several women at Green Gate, and it happened to me, as well. And that's what I write about in the book. But the other scary thing about the zapping is women would wake up after maybe two or three weeks of rain, no sun for weeks, and everyone would be sunburned. And you could put your hand over somebody's arm, and you could feel the skin like radiating heat. So we knew we were being radiated, because we couldn't see it or smell it or taste it. We knew it was radiation. But we didn't know why. Were the bombs leaking? Was it a weapon? We didn't know anything except that, that we all felt really scared and really sick. And there were actually women that didn't want us to talk about it because they didn't want the focus taken off cruise. Cruise was the thing, we have to stop the weapons. But there were other women who were so sick and so debilitated that they - and scared of it - that they had to talk about it. And finally a woman named Rosalie Bertell came and she was a nun from Canada. And she was also a paediatrician, who had done all this work with children who grew up, who had cancers, childhood cancers from growing up near nuclear power plants, or nuclear bomb plants. So she knew a lot about radiation. And she wrote a book called No Immediate Danger that was all about radiation, unintended radiation. And she heard about what was happening at Greenham and then she came. And she brought measuring instruments and measured what it was and went away and found out and came back and told us what it was - showed us pictures of the, what the weapon looks like in the hand, like some cop holding it. It looked like a megaphone, and it was a photic driver, P H, O, T, I, C like photon, and it drove these photons into your body. They could make zapping they could make it really spread out so that everybody felt vaguely ill and it was pretty weak signal, or they could make a really strong signal and zero in on one person and and theoretically kill them with it. They could give the leader a heart attack and, and just blow them up in front of everybody. And that would stop a demonstration. So whenever the convoy came out, and we tried to blockade it, or built fires, we would build fires in the road that was one of the most amazing things I've ever experienced a 20 foot fire in the middle of a road. And, and, and all these cops would come, 200 cops would come out to stop us. And this zapping would go on so high that you could see the air coming apart. It almost looked like you were looking at pixels on a screen. Like you know when you take a picture and you blow up the screen so much that it just gets all pixelated. That's what the scene looked like. I actually have photos that look like that, you could see it on pictures. Anyway women got really sick Rosalie Bertell's advice was to get the hell out of there because we were all getting cancer. That women were, it was all gonna collect in our reproductive organs and, and give us cancer and we needed to leave. But mostly we didn't leave. And we just kept, kept going with it. I left after, like I said three or three and a half years because I was so sick, I couldn't even, I couldn't even hardly speak anymore. I couldn't be around electricity at all. If I went into a Sainsbury's it would those, those fluorescent lights would just bring me to my knees. It was so harsh. And that's why I left Greenham. And that's why for

another 10 years, I just lived on lesbian lands because they didn't have electricity. And they were very mellow places in the States when I came home, because I couldn't be around electricity. And I still have I still have quite a few symptoms of the zapping. It's really affected my, the way that my brain works. And you know recently I think it was about, I was just trying to find it in my journal and I can't find it. The page, had so many pages written since the last year but there was a story about these men. I think they were all men who were in Cuba, and Korea, I think, in US bases and they got sick. And they didn't know what it was and they couldn't see it or smell it or taste it or - they just felt so sick. And they, they all had to leave. And they came here to Walter Reed. And Walter Reed said it was electromagnetic radiation poisoning from microwaves, and said that they had traumatic brain injury. That was their diagnosis. And they had this one guy on Rachel Maddow - do you know who she is? She's a really powerful reporter. She's a lesbian too which we love, but she's a reporter, and she does really good work. And this guy was talking to her. And he said, you know, I'm in the CIA, and I have had, they tried to kill me. I've had assassination attempts, I've been in war zones. And I've never been more terrified than I was at whatever the hell this was that I got poisoned with. So it's the same poisoning. It's just maybe a little bit worse now, or a little bit more evolved. It's the vision for the future war. It's very scary. So I don't know if that made any sense at all.

It made perfect sense, thank you very much. And so you went to Greenham to try and, you know, get them to remove nuclear weapons. Um could you talk us through some of the non-violent direct actions that you took part in, in your time there?

The actions? Oh, yeah. Well, I got there in August, right before Hiroshima day, like two days before Hiroshima day. So two days after I got there, I went into the base with a bunch of women and had my first arrest. We were just, I don't even remember what we went in for. I guess to paint the runways, it was often to paint the runways because there were a lot of runways at Greenham, and they were these big big, beautiful canvases for us. So we painted that runway. I remember when, when Gorbachev came to sign the the peace treaty with Reagan that would remove, or with Thatcher or whoever the hell they made a treaty, that would remove all those weapons. And women went and spray painted the runway as welcome Raisa, who was Gorbachev's wife. So we did this whole party to welcome her with spray paint on the runways. We, you know, I went in a few times, just to scope it out just to look around I, I felt like a lot of our incursions into the base were to find out information. So women would take pictures or would try to find different buildings or find, once they got into different buildings to find different documents. There were documents found for nuclear war there were, you know, for how to sort of launch these cruise missiles off the convoys. There would be - so that was one of our actions. I yeah, I remember actions to and in courtrooms where women were on trial and Greenham Women would just fill the courtroom to shut it down and to shout out over the prosecution. I had never seen anything like that because in in America, you you can't, you can't act out in a courtroom like that. So that was pretty cool. We we did a great - oh, we did a

great action that was, where we locked the gates at Yellow Gate. There was a big NATO contingent coming, a general, a four star general was coming from America to oversee the troops. And the convoy was what was supposed to go out. And all these NATO guys had come to watch. And so we had heard about it. I think we heard about it because somebody stole some papers off the commander's desk. That was always happening. So we would hear what they were planning. They also heard what we were planning because they had directional microphones in the trees, we found out later. But, so we had known about that and, and women went and bought this great chain and these huge padlocks and hid them in a baby carriage. We were always hiding things in prams, and right before the convoy came out, they were lined up just behind the gate at Yellow Gate, we were on the other side of the gate. The gate was closed, because they always closed the gate at Yellow Gate because we would try to get in there. We would rush it all the time. And women made a fuss so that the soldiers and the police were looking at these women who are making a big fuss on this one side of the fence and meanwhile these two elders went up with the baby carriage, pulled out the chain and the padlock and locked the gates at Yellow Gate so they couldn't open them. And that was awesome. And we built a fire in the road. And while all that was there was a tunnel, because they couldn't get the gates open, and they sent a fire fire trucks came in, and police horses came in. And these cops came these 200 cops that always came came. But the media was there because we had called all the media before we did this. That was an important part to put in sorry. Before we put, locked the gate, we invited the BBC and Peace News and everybody in between to come to Greenham for this big party that we were going to have. So there was so much media, there was so many TV cameras, that they had to be nice to us, or were a little less violent. And in the end, they wound up taking the whole gate apart at the hinges, and then we blockaded them again. So there was just a day of blockades and arrests and letting the air out of the tyres of the vans that had the arrested women in them. And it was just complete and utter chaos. That beautiful creative chaos on our side. So that felt really like a happy day. That was a really happy day. Yeah.

So we've talked about, after, around the bombing of Tripoli, Libya. Erm, could you talk us through the action that you were involved in when you did get arrested and kind of, as you said, formed the framework of the book?

Yeah, sure. Um, so they were trying to kill Gaddafi. The United States, Reagan was trying to kill Gaddafi and he bombed Libya with, with planes that were at Upper Heyford. Upper Heyford is another US Air Force base that's right down the road from Greenham. I think it's like four miles away. There are a lot of bases, US bases in England or there used to be 190 I think. Anyway, these planes bombed Tripoli they killed they wrecked the palace. Gaddafi got out but they killed his wife and his daughter and blocks and blocks of flats that were close to the palace got bombed, lots of people died. And the next day, we woke up to that news and there were lots of actions that Greenham Women took. One of the actions was women went to Upper Heyford and and got into these aeroplanes, these fighter jets and removed, pulled things apart,

pulled out wires pulled off knobs, came back with with them in their hands. It was great. We went to Welford. Welford is also very close to Greenham, maybe four miles in the other direction is the largest bomb storage unit in all of Europe. Which, Britain is not part of Europe anymore. I keep saying Europe as if, sorry. But of all Europe and Britain.

Yeah.

Welford has those cluster bombs that were used to bomb Tripoli. So we went in to paint the bombs. Women had been at Welford a lot. I went in with two or three women, British women and three American women. The British women were very serious. And they had all been into Welford before. And they had made very detailed maps. And it was easy to get into Welford. And they knew just where the cluster bombs were kept. But boy that night, it was not easy. And there were so many patrols of American soldiers and we cut our way in it was easier to cut that fence. There were fewer ranks and ranks of fences. You know at Greenham, there were eight ranks of fences you had to cut through to get in to the important stuff. At Welford there was like one. We got in and then we painted the bombs. We found the bombs. We painted them, we painted the runways. And then we got caught. And when we got caught, we got beaten up by American soldiers, young American soldiers. Rebecca's knee was broken, my ribs were broken. My ribs had been broken before by a soldier when I got caught inside Greenham. So they were re-broken. And then we were arrested and and put in solitary confinement for five days in, at Newbury, in cells that I didn't even know existed. And it was really scary because, we, they wouldn't charge us we weren't charged for four days. We were just held and I was in so much pain and I didn't get to see a doctor or get any treatment at all. But it was a powerful action because the war was so imminent. Like I've always felt like war was imminent, and I still feel, I feel a little better now that Joe Biden is president. But I I have felt terrified most of my peace activist life. But that was really scary because we couldn't get out. And one of the things I remember thinking is I don't mind dying in the woods with the women at Greenham. I don't mind dying right there. But I don't want to die alone in a cell in the basement of a jail. Anyway, we we, we did that. But there were a lot of actions because it was such an outrage that this had happened to us that we were so hurt. It got out in The Guardian the next day. And there was so many actions for the next five days of women going into Welford, like these memorial actions on our behalf, and nobody got arrested anymore. They were being really careful at that point, because the publicity was finally so bad, because we were so hurt. And I think that's why in the end, they did drop the charges, even though we went to trial a year later. But they did drop the charges in the end. But that was, that was a big action. That was April 1986.

Right.

Yeah.

And do you think that the peace camp worked?

Yeah, yes. Absolutely. It worked. It worked on so many levels, like I think it worked definitely to get rid of those particular cruise missiles, which are probably on boats or planes now, they didn't get destroyed. But they're not there anymore. It worked to get intermediate range nuclear weapons taken out of all of Europe. Nothing else worked, like Greenham worked in my entire, you know, 40 year experience as an activist. I have never seen success around a nuclear issue, a nuclear war issue. Greenham was a brilliant success. So I think it worked politically and militarily that all these civilians, women, and children and teenagers and grandmothers were willing to risk everything to expose this terrible, terrible secret that was happening. So it shone a light on the darkness and, and revealed the truth. I think it also worked in that it made us so brave and strong. It taught us all how to stand up to patriarchy. And, and where the choke points were. And also it worked in connecting us to the world. The whole world came to Greenham with all their causes, whether it was nuclearization and radiation in the, in the South Pacific, or whether it was apartheid in South Africa, or whether it was rape, or whether it was, you know, mining. All the all the issues, because, you know, Mary Daly once said that patriarchy, the lies of patriarchy are so badly told that if you just pull one little string, the whole thing falls apart. And so you can get in on any level, you can get in on the level of racism, you can get in on the level of animal rights, you can get in on the level of war or LGBT issues or whatever. But once you're in, once you start to question patriarchy, you see it all in a minute. And that it was like, it was like a giant University, an 11 year long University for all of us to learn about our world and to learn about our power. And so those two things were fabulous. And the missiles are gone. Yay.

Do you think something like Greenham could happen again?

No, I mean, the level of militarisation of the police now, I don't know what it's like in England, and I don't know what it's like in Europe. But in the United States, you can't do anything without being faced by these, it's like fighting the Roman legions, you know, it's they're in, they're in tanks, and they're in armour, and they've got crazy weapons, and they will use them. I don't think we would ever be able to be vulnerable, and just stand in our skin and say no, without being slaughtered at this point. So I think we really have to change our tactics. You know, I, in where I live in Colorado, there's a lot of fracking. Do you know what fracking is?

Yeah.

Yeah. So, so it's huge here. And after Greenham, I sort of got out of fighting against nuclear war because it was just so sad and huge and and it seemed like I didn't even know what the next move was because like we were just saying after Greenham I don't think we could do that again. But I needed something. So I became a wicked environmentalist. And I think that the, that

life on Earth is is threatened right now by climate change and that the biggest enemies of climate are the oil companies and the fracking is one of the stupidest things in the world. So I've been involved with pipeline projects and fracking for years now. But I wanted to, for the last 10 years, I wanted to have a women's peace camp at a fracking pad. Just have all the women come and meet and just fucking live there. Just sit down and don't leave just like we did a Greenham and get the press out. Because if it's women, I think it's really different than if it's mixed. So that was my thought for the longest time, but I think that they would kill us, I really do. But it's a fantasy of mine. It's a fantasy to have a project like that. And I wonder if it would work. I wonder what will work now. You know, I'm, I'm 65, I'm tired. I'm sad. I've just, I just don't have much hope. Except that evolution is changed, and it just keeps changing. And so, no matter what, like the other this whole year, and especially with the fascism and the authoritarianism of Trump, I've been thinking like, we have to fight we have to save this country, we have to save this country. And then I would stop and think, why? What am I saving? Am I saving a complete and total lie that you know, that killed Native American people and enslaved black people and hates women and, you know, the whole lie of democracy, the Constitution? I'm going to fucking protect my fucking constitution? No, I don't even believe in most of the Constitution and, and so I think just let it go, man, let it, just let it go. Let whatever's going to happen happen. Because we can't kill life. I used to think we could save life. Now I know that life has got this. Life has got this even if we strip this whole planet down to the, to the mycelium, life has got this. And it's evolution, it's change. And I think I believe in evolution a whole lot more than I believe in the Constitution of the United States, or the sham of democracy. And so I don't know what the future holds. But I, I kind of go back and forth between feeling really, really hopeless, and feeling really, really ecstatic in nature and what's going to happen with life. It's just going to keep going. And that was a beautiful realisation, a spiritual realisation that I have finally come to in my old age, so there's that.

Do you see any similarities with protests or movements today? Like Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter and the Occupy movement? Do you see them doing similar things to Greenham or not? You think it's, it's changed a lot, activism?

No, I think it's, I think it has changed a lot. But I think Greenham really is the template that inspired so much. I'm going to read this one piece from my book, if I can find it. Oh, yeah, I write 'It's imperative to know our history. Our actions, like Greenham drew inspiration from Lysistrata and the Suffragettes and all justice movements against totalitarianism, like the underground railroad and resistance to Nazis. But Greenham in turn inspired direct actions of Earth First, and Code Pink and Occupy Wall Street.' I think I think that the Rebellion is brilliant. I love Extinction Rebellion, I love what they're doing. I love the movement of Black Lives Matter. And, and the, you know, the movement to just shine a light. It's all about shining a light, isn't it?

Yeah.

I mean, I, I hope that people aren't so stupid and so greedy that once they see the truth, which, you know, truth has been under attack in this country for the last four years, but there such a thing as truth. And once we see the crazy shit that's being done in our name, in the name of convenience, in the name of, you know, corporate power, I think that people will rise up and rising up looks like a lot of different things. It's not just throwing your body against a tank or laying down in the road. You know, resistance is about how we, how we spend money and how we live our lives. Like I have tried to live my life in as much resistance as I can. I'm not plugged into anything. I have off grid solar power. I hardly ever leave my house. I live in the woods and I walk in the woods all day and I try, like I don't have a cell phone. I, I just got running water. We had 18 years of carrying water up the mountain to just have water. I am trying to not be deluded by these notions of progress. And so I just try to live my life consistent with what I believe in which is resisting corporate power and resisting greed and you know, evil. Sounds so silly, but yeah.

Wow. Can you, maybe on a slightly lighter note, but could you tell us the story about the headstands in Newbury jail?

Oh, one of the things that we could hear each other - the walls were cement, but we could hear each other if we yelled really loud. So we would sing to each other and yell at each other. And on the second day, I don't remember who did it but one of, probably the Americans said, 'Hey, let's let's do some handstands.' You know, 'Let's just all do a handstand together.' And then we'll, we'll be in, you know, some kind of solidarity and it'll be goofy and it'll be fun. And so we did handstands every day. And then one day, Hershee, I think, said, 'Let's do naked handstands.' It was cold in that jail. 'Let's do naked handstands!' And so I tore off all my clothes and made a pile of them and put my head on it and stood up with my broken ribs on my head. And, and it hurt. And I wound up falling down and rolling around crying on the floor, but laughing too. And, and at the end, when we all got out, after the first hearing, and we all walked outside of the building and into the beautiful April day, god April is so beautiful in England, and just collapsed on the lawn and rolled around. And I said to my friends, 'Man, those naked handstands really helped me.' And they all looked at me. And one raised her eyebrow and said, 'You did not? You really did that?' And I said, 'Of course I did it! We all did it! What are you talking about? Come on. Come on.' 'Oh, you really fell for that?' And apparently, it was me doing naked handstands alone in my cell. Which, which was helpful. It was helpful in the end.

It helped get you through!

Whatever makes you laugh, whatever makes you laugh.

Definitely. Made me laugh. Oh, yeah. Yeah. You talked about getting regular people kind of talking about cruise. Did you - what experiences did you have? Like, you know, the term regular people, but people who weren't staying at Greenham

whether it be visitors or whatever. You know, did you find, yes, spreading the word possible? To people who

Oh yeah. I felt like it was really enhanced by the fact that the world came to us. Like I didn't leave. I didn't leave the camp forever. Like, I didn't go anywhere. I would take a shower about every three weeks. But people brought us everything. They brought us food. They brought us what they brought us newspapers and the world. And so visitors would come all summer long and on weekends and sometimes in the winter. And they would just want to hear stories. And I love stories. And so I think we just got really good at telling stories. And getting the word out. We got the word out I think in a really good way. Also the media would come. So yeah, it was really easy to get the word out. That was great.

You said people would often ask similar questions and people would ask what do you do all day and night when you're there? Talk us through a kind of an average day at Greenham.

Gosh. For me an average day well, it depended on what gate but since I was mostly at Yellow Gate, an average day was waking up in a, in a bender, next to women on either side under a piece of plastic laying on straw, waking up and smelling wood smoke because that fire never went out. Somebody was always tending that fire it was so, it was such a symbol. So waking up, getting dressed, staggering to the fire. Finding out if there was time for a cup of tea before the eviction and and trying to find a cup and trying to find a tea bag and trying to build up the fire to boil water. And then we would get evicted. And that almost always happened first thing in the morning. Sometimes we got to have a cup of tea first. The bailiffs would come with police to protect them from us, and a big garbage truck that they called the muncher. We would wait until we saw them and then we would put everything on, on our prams or in our, in our vans - we had a couple of vans at Yellow Gate, and the vans would drive off. And just not far, but just off the property there and, and we would roll away the prams. And then we would, they would put the fire out, they would take everything they could grab, they would try to get you know the wood and the food and the benders. They would try to get backpacks with passports in them, those were very valuable. And then they would leave. And then we would set it all up again. So by that time, it would be almost noon. And it would be time to eat something. We would make food I often ate canned beans with raw garlic in them. Just to try to stay healthy out there in the rain, in the cold. I was used to living in Colorado where it's sunny all the time even though it's quite cold in the winter. So I was just cold the whole time I was at Greenham it was freezing. Anyway, I would just take a can of beans, open it up, put it in a pot and add raw garlic and eat it right out of a can or, or sometimes even right out of the can. And then visitors would be there, visitors would come all day long. And we would sit around the fire and tell stories. If we needed something, or if I got - I like to walk. So I would often walk to Green Gate or walk to Blue Gate just to visit. I also like to visit. So I would walk a lot. And then back for night time. Somebody would make dinner.

If it was winter time we had food runs. And every night for the whole entire winter - it gets dark very early, as you know in Britain. Probably even earlier in York, where you are. But it would be dark and and hard to cook by four. And so we had these food brands that would come and these night watches that would come so that we could sleep. And women would stay up all night around the fire to protect us and they would bring us food in the winter. And more stories and more actions. Usually the actions happened in the dark in the evening. And so there was always actions happening it felt like anytime you wanted to get arrested or anytime you wanted to cut the fence, maybe not get arrested but cut, cut the fence and go into the base - there was always something going on. And so part of my walking was like a little reconnaissance in the day I would find out what Blue Gate had planned or what Green Gate had planned and they would have heard from Violet Gate or they would have heard from Orange Gate. So it was a very, you know was before cell phones. And and we had no way to communicate. It was a big base, nine, nine miles around. So walking was the only way to sort of find out what was going on. Sometimes somebody would drive a van over. But mostly it was for me it was like a walking reconnaissance to find out what are we doing next. And then there were big actions. So those were very unusual. Those were not your regular, normal day. In the winter too, the one winter I think it was '87, it might have been '88, we got evicted all day long. They would do evictions five times a day. So you would, they would come and take everything you'd have to move it all away, then you'd set it back up, then they'd come again. You'd move what you could grab. So eventually we were just living with everything over the road. Everything was on the other side of the road and we would have to cross the road if we wanted to get a drink of water. We would have to cross the road and bring wood back to the fire circle because we couldn't leave anything out because it was a non stop eviction. And that was really, kept on your toes and it kept you warm. It was cold in the winter so kept moving, it was good.

Yeah, you've talked a bit about the peace chariots, haven't you, the pram?

Oh the peace chariot. Yeah.

Yeah. Do you want to describe that to us because it sounds like a fascinating item.

Oh my gosh, so we had everybody had prams. That's what, was our main method of eviction and also storage. So one pram would have the the mail or the post and the tea and another pram would have all the silverware and the cups and another pram would have the wood and the bolt cutters. But this one pram the, the peace chariot it came from Wales. The original women that walked to bring them I don't know what in '83 maybe was that '83?

It was '81.

'83 Yeah.

No the original walk was 1981.

Oh, 1981 thank you. So they came in 1981 from Wales and they brought the peace chariot. They wheeled it all the way from Wales to Greenham and it stayed at Yellow Gate. And so that was so heavy, and it was reinforced with wood. That was probably oak, or something very strong and heavy. So the peace chariot weighed a gazillion pounds. And the peace chariot mostly had the food in it, because it was the biggest of all the prams. And so taking that up and down, there was a curb at Yellow Gate. You had to go up and down, it had great big springs which were amazing. It was almost like a car chassis underneath it. But the thing weighed so much, that it was really hard to manoeuvre and manipulate around. But it was it was like a, an emblem or what do you call it? When something is is like the, the anyway, it was emblematic. And it was our mascot, it was like a mascot.

Could you tell, talk a little bit more about what else, because you said it was like a university, erm what else you learned at Greenham from from other women while you were there. You talk a lot about, you know, life, your life being a social jail and talking, you know, a man made social jail and talking about the patriarchy. And you talk a lot about how much you learnt there. Yeah. Can you talk about that at all?

Well, one of the things that, that stands out to me is these women were on a tour from the Pacific Islands. I think they were from, oh god, you know, those islands that got nuked so bad in, before they dropped the bomb in '45. They tested it out in oh, the Marshall Islands. And so there was this contingent of women from the Marshall Islands who were touring, I think all of Europe, and came to Greenham to talk about what their experience was of living in a radioactive on a radioactive island. And they were telling us how their babies, so many of their babies were born as just these blobs of jelly that had no brains and weren't connected. Like they weren't neurologically hooked up at all. And they all died. But they would carry these babies for nine months, who would be born completely mutated like that. And I remember them saying, 'We're not asking you to save us. We're telling you what your, we're showing you your future. This is your future. And don't feel sorry for us, but fight to change the future for yourselves.' That was really, really powerful to me. Yeah, so I learned a lot about

Sorry, I was just gonna say you said that you mentioned Zohl de Ihstar in your book. I know Zohl when I spoke to her, talked about those women as well, a lot.

Yeah and Zohl, I think she might even organised that whole tour, because she knew a lot of those women from before. Yeah. You interviewed Zohl - that's good. Yeah. That's great.

Yeah. Yeah. We've interviewed a few women that you mentioned, that you mention in the book.

You know, Vanessa, I, it's, I hadn't talked to anybody else who'd been to Greenham in decades since I left really, until recently, I joined Facebook, like two years ago. I'm very slow to technology. But I did join Facebook, and I found all these Greenham Women on Facebook. And that was amazing to me. That was so wonderful. I have talked to Rebecca Johnson a bit. But besides that, I would wander around and think did I make that up? Did that really happen? Because nobody talks about it in the States. And so it's so wonderful to find Stephanie's book. And you and and the Green Gate - no, it's a, maybe it's a Blue Gate, Facebook page, and I just, I just feel so reconnected. It's wonderful. I am so happy.

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Awesome, and I'm so glad that you could find my book.

It's great. I think my favourite chapter - My favourite, all of them, like, there was so many powerful chapters in there. But my favourite one to read that I really took pleasure from was the ode to the fence.

Oh, the love letter to the fence.

The love letter to the fence. And you're writing the whole chapter is to, you know, kind of personifying the fence. And it's, it's beautiful and poetic, but also very informative about kind of all of the things that the fence has experienced and seen. I thought that was a fascinating approach. I really, yeah, I really, really liked that. It's fantastic.

Oh, thank you. That's great. Oh, that fence. I still have some some cuttings of that fence. And everybody that loves me has a cutting of that fence on their altar, because I sent so many pieces of the fence back to America in the mail in the post.

Oh, what a lovely thing.

So many probably like 50 pieces.

Oh that's a lovely thing to give. I love that, that's brilliant.

Yes. It just seemed like the perfect symbol of resistance, just a piece of a nuclear fence. And also, we would use it for the grate, you know, that we would put over the fire.

Yeah.

And that was a wonderful thing. But yeah. Oh, what a joy. Thank you so much, Vanessa, for interviewing me, I'm so happy.

I've not asked you about what you wanted to talk about!

Oh, gosh, um, you know, I just want to say too that I wrote the book, when Trump was elected. That's what finally got me to sit down and focus and pull all those disparate journals and memories and, and fragments together. Because I would have died. I think it would have killed me just having Trump be president for four years. And it almost killed me. It really felt like I was, I got broken into bits. And, but, but writing the book, which was published in 2017, was really helpful. Because it got me to think about - not just not to think about Trump, but to think about maybe an antidote to Trump, or at least it was medicine. Like, look what we did once, once upon a time, you know, it was that whole once upon a time thing like, wow, it was so encouraging, it encouraged me. It filled my heart with goodness, and, and beauty and, and humour and love in a way that I don't think anything else could have gotten me through so, so completely. So yeah, I think that's important to say.

Yeah, definitely, absolutely. Thank you very much. Could I just end with one final question that we try to ask for all of the Greenham Women. Erm why do you think it is so important to preserve the legacy of Greenham and for future generations to be aware of it?

Oh, boy, because we did this thing that was so amazing. It was so mythic, and epic and triumphant in the end, it was so brave. And it was so good. We have to preserve it. We have to preserve it to inspire the future. We have to preserve it to hold on to the idea of women's space, which is disappearing faster than the Amazon. You know, it makes me so sad that women's lands are disappearing and women only bars are disappearing and women only spaces are disappearing in this world. The word women is disappearing in this world. And so as we change into whatever the next iteration of feminism is going to be, I don't want to lose what we were, which was marvellous and magical.