

Carolyn E Francis

Shall we just start by you just telling me a bit about why you decided to go to Greenham and kind of your first - how you got there - what your first impressions were of getting there.

Okay, so at that time, which is - I didn't really go 'til um, June or July '84. I don't remember the date really - sometime around then. But I had a bit of a crisis - been travelling in Canada, canoeing and stuff, and then come back to do college, and dropped out of an outdoor education course in Bangor. And um, I just couldn't focus, so I'd left it. And then I was like what do I do next? And my mother lived just north of London. So I put my tent in her garden pretending that I didn't live - I hadn't gone back, you know?

Yeah.

And my sister was living in North London. And she was fairly involved with - she'd already, she'd been very involved for some already down at Greenham. And my mum had gone down there as well. So in North London, there was um, some women had - Islington Council had given them a four story house, I think there was a basement and a kitchen level, and then an office level and then the top floor was like for sleeping, and a little garden out the back. And it was like a London base camp for the Greenham women's movement. I don't know if you know about that?

And Islington Council gave them that?

That's the story that I know, Fiona was there, and I think she'd put that together with someone else. Fiona is in Scotland, in Edinburgh still - still in touch with her a little bit.

Ah lovely.

So I, for me, it was more of a personal thing. I was having this crisis of what do I do? And I was making money - I was basically making a living busking in North London and, and then my sister was involved with the Greenham movement and was looking after the Greenham house on a temporary basis, and so I just started to hang out there, and sleep there sometimes. And I used to busk down in Kings Cross, and then buy food, and bring it back to the house, really. And then I'd go swimming, or go with my UB40 for free in the Caledonian swimming pool, and then come back. And so, and then one time there was a, they were gonna have a big discussion - I think they called it a corroboree at Greenham, there was like, decision making process was everyone just in a big group talking about this, that the other, like, round a fire, like for as long as it took, you know.

Wow.

And so that was happening, and they called it down at camp. So I'd never been - I was like hanging out in the, in the London base.

Yeah.

Just because of how my sister was there. And because I was busking. And because I didn't live anywhere, and, and then because I played the fiddle, people said to me 'You must come down and play, because we need music at this thing, we can't just have talk.'

Yeah, yeah.

So that was really how I first went down there - through that. That was the first time.

So I'm gonna ask you more about the camp in a minute, and the fiddle.

Sure. Yeah. Yeah.

But I wanted to quickly, just for people, like again, can we just talk a bit more about what the house was for as a base? Like how did the Greenham women use it? Because that's a really - I didn't know about it until you talked about on the phone very briefly.

Yeah.

I'd never heard of it. So what kind of was its role for Greenham women?

It was a communication centre, London based communication centre, so there's, and also a place to stay - London base. So there was a there was like, the second, anyway, the second floor was telephones. There's no computers in them days I don't think. There's telephones. And paper, and I suppose that, really. And and then the top floor was just a whole floor full of mattresses as far as I remember.

Really?

Yeah.

Was this for women to have a break if they'd been at the camp a long time?

Yeah, so that I remember there were quite a few people from abroad.

Ah, okay.

Australian woman was there. And it was - people who were coming to support the movement, but coming from away. So as communications centre kind of almost, so I don't really know - you'd have to talk to someone else who set it up - I do know the people that set it up. But I think, so this friend of mine, Fiona, she was one of the people that went to the council and said 'Can we have a - can we have a base camp in London?'

Brilliant.

But I don't know, I've got a feeling it might be Jeremy Corbyn's constituency as well. I've just - I've never checked that out, but Islington, I think because him being involved in CND and stuff.

Yeah, that makes sense.

So I think that was given as a contribution by the Council - didn't they declare themselves a nuclear free zone- Islington Council?

I think you're right.

So I think it's probably something like that, but I don't really know. And then Fiona was er, that was my link into this Buddhist practice because she was already practicing. And she lived in the bottom bit...

Of the house?

Yeah, in the basement and was chanting away. And I knew, vaguely knew about it, she was quite secretive. She wouldn't really tell anyone as well - like chant for peace on a Sunday, you know, once a month.

On her own or with other people?

Um, so she told close people, but she didn't like...

She didn't try to convert?

No, no. You actually got more and more curious about what is going on down there, you know?

Yeah. How old were you?

I was 20 at that time... 26/25/26. Yeah.

So then, did you start practicing with her before you went to Greenham?

Oh, no, I didn't - you mean the chanting?

Yeah.

No, she wouldn't tell! (Laughs). She didn't tell me. She kept me interested. And then another woman on this one, when I went down to this corroboree thing with the fiddle, the next morning, this woman showed me, who was in the same social network said 'Let's do this chant.' And it was just the most amazing experience actually, for me, it was like, it really just opened my mind and focused my mind. I was very agitated at the time very un, was quite, didn't know where I was going, what I was doing, I'd lost my sense of myself, really. And it had a very instant effect for me of just knowing, on my mind, somehow, I just thought - I felt more in touch with myself. So I dabbled a bit. And then after the summer, um, we both moved back north, this woman that showed me dibna, she's still in Northampton. And so, because I was kind of homeless at the time, I decided to go back to Lancaster where I friends and community and build my life from there. So err...

And that first chanting was that outside at Greenham?

Yeah, under a tree at Green Gate. Yeah.

Oh, wow.

So it's like, it's really to do, for me whilst being there at this kind of protest movement was fantastic for lots, of in lots of ways. It kind of launched the thing that I've based my, built my life from since, so very significant, really.

Yeah.

And then, you know, because I've, I've chanted twice a day, well, I dabbled 'til the following February. And then, and then I started in a

committed way really February '85. Never really looked back. So, um, yeah, so..

And correct me if I'm wrong about this, but the gate - you mentioned Green Gate, and they all have their own personalities, don't they?

Yes.

And Green Gate was the sort of spiritual - is that right?

Yeah, kind of eco, hippie. Suited me, really.

Was going to say - it sounds lovely.

Yeah, I remember living inside this holly tree, someone had built a house right inside this holly bush, I used to sleep in there.

Oh my goodness.

And I really liked the bathroom tree - I thought was such a great idea.

Please tell me more about the bathroom tree!

Well, it just have mirrors hanging on it. So and then bowls of water. So it's where you brushed your teeth and did your hair or whatever you did, but it's like a tree. It wasn't like a place. It was just a tree. I've never forgotten that tree!

That's amazing. Someone told me that, that the green camp..

Green Gate.

Green Gate, sorry was calm because someone had bought the land to put the camp on.

I don't know about that.

Okay.

I don't know about that.

But it does seem to have - everyone kind of says they...

It was calmer.

Yeah. And is that the place you usually visited and went - or?

Also the Yellow Gate, but I generally slept, Green Gate was - that would be my gate. My sister was Yellow Gate hardcore, snip through the fence, jump on the commander's bonnet, get locked up for a week in Holloway, she just really went for it. My sister, Sally, yeah. She was coming from another place. Interestingly now, I'm 60. She's 58. We've started from different places, and we've come in meeting later in life. The different um, value systems are kind of a, you know, you'd have thought - we found ourselves in different ways, but now we're coming together, more integrate - each other's values seem to be integrated in our lives. It's very interesting.

That's interesting.

Yeah.

When you were both at Greenham what would you say your two different value systems were then?

Well, she was very involved with the um, lesbian, protest, lesbian feminists. She wasn't totally separatist. But on the fringe of that. And um, I was just a hippie. (Laughs). Wandering around with a fiddle, annoying people, not being able to live anywhere! (Laughs). But actually they couldn't really throw me out because I was quite useful with my music and bringing money. You know! (Laughs).

There's so much talked about with the music. Music is such a big part of...

The songs and stuff.

Yeah. So tell us a bit about the role that you feel music played, and perhaps music that you bought to Greenham and played.

Well, you've presumably found that song book that's archived online?

Yeah, fabulous.

So a lot of those songs were, I remember - you can look through that, and I remember hearing those songs. So people were singing those songs, but um, I think music always binds people, doesn't it? It binds people. So I had an experience recently about the word band. So I play, now play borah pipes, I've been learning for about 15 years. And I played for a wedding up at a stone circle near Keswick. And it was a celebrant, from a kind of humanistic pagan guy, you know, one of these, the people didn't seem that hippy like, but he was. And he got this band and he said, this 'I now, I bind you together with this band', and he got this cloth and he bound them together - their wrists, these people that were getting wed. And I heard the word band, and I'd never really heard it before.

Oh yeah!

And I realised that when we play in a band, the purpose of a band is to bind.

Oh how lovely.

So I've never really thought that before. So I think that's what the function of music and community. I mean, community music's quite a big thing now, isn't it?

Yeah.

You know, it's kind of a thing. It is a thing that people do and talk about and philosophise about.

Yeah, and you felt that - it does sound like it did have that effect at Greenham?

Yeah, it always does, I think. People always sing in the protest movements, don't they?

Yes, they do. That's true.

But the biggest thing for me, I think, was in terms of people I met there. Because I didn't live there like permanently and long term, but I was there for chunks of time, on and off mostly through that summer of '84. And then after that, when I moved back up north, I went back a few times. Um, was the fact that I was at a point in my life where I didn't, I was quite lost, and I didn't feel good, and I didn't know - and um, er, so you really did feel that you were important because you were alive. And that was enough. And I did have those feelings there.

Is that from Greenham and from Green Gate?

From being - just from being at Greenham.

Really?

Yeah. So there are all kinds of people there. There are people with quite serious mental health issues, that were being looked after within that community.

Wow.

There was somebody living at Yellow Gate, I remember, who was probably schizophrenia, but the community was looking after her. And

everybody was important because they were there and alive. And that - I'd never been part of that anything like that before. And that was probably the biggest thing that struck me.

That's lovely.

Yeah.

And did you feel that you had a value? Because you're a musician as well, that you were valued and wanted there? Because you could bring that?

Well, that's my particular thing, isn't it? I might have been kind of a lost soul at the time. I don't consider myself a lost soul any longer.

You don't seem lost!

But yeah, but at the time, even though I was lost, I could play.

Yeah.

And that gave me a role and purpose, where I was valued. So yeah, very important.

That's lovely.

And that was kind of transferable into the decisions I made about how to live after - which was, what matters is that I play music and connect with people through that, because that's my thing. Made it really clear I suppose, yeah.

I was going to say, is there a sort of legacy that Greenham's had in your life? But it clearly, it clearly did - Greenham's, it does sound that through Buddhism, and like you say, restoring the purpose of music for you, it seems like it comes quite a lot out of that time is that...

Yeah, certainly certainly. Yeah. The kind of the role of the music, I kind of consolidated that in about '96 when I got a job as a community musician - well that sort of thing. I trained in youth and community work. And I'd always played music kind of part time, but I got this job in Morecambe as official kind of - I was called I was called a Community Musician - I didn't know such a thing existed, you know. So that was when I really decided well, everything that's meant anything in my life has been through playing. So, you know, I've got these qualifications, degree in ecology, you know, whatever. But, you know, um, I'm not going to suddenly wake up with amazing career in anything because I'm still basically jobbing about playing a fiddle. So why don't I make that my thing? You see what I mean?

Yeah. Yeah, totally.

So it was, that was a gradual evolution. But when I thought that I thought, well, that was what made the difference. That's when I was at Greenham, that's when I met this practice, this Buddhist practice I do. So it all tied it in, so it was quite a big step to take. Because you risk a lot, don't you once you decide - well acting is not dissimilar, once you decide to live on the fringes and just make your way however, through your particular skill, you know, rather than, rather than hopping around trying to get a job (laughs)!

Yeah! (Laughs).

Do you know what I mean? It's quite a risk. You're never gonna have much money but, it's quite, can be quite - you can have a lot of adventures.

Yes, that's a lovely way of putting it. That's what I tell myself too! (Laughs).

Is it?

It's also...

And also you're not true to yourself if you're boxed in.

Yeah.

You can't - just doesn't work, does it?

No, absolutely. And do you feel like Greenham was quite permissive about allowing you to be yourself?

Yeah. Oh, there was conflict.

Yeah.

Definitely between people's philosophies and ideas. That's why you had all the different gates with the different, you know, people, different kinds of people who had similar ideas hanging out at the different gates.

And people who didn't get on so well could find their place away from the people they didn't get on with?

Well, just, I think just generally true in life, you tend to gravitate to people who think similarly. So just because - I think people were at Greenham for all kinds of reasons based on their own kind of life states and ideas.

Yeah.

Um, but putting life first in a sense.

Yes.

And that's the feeling I had from it, you know? So not everybody was there for like, like, protesting about nuclear weapons.

Right.

Some people just being there being themselves. But in a sense, in the broader sense that is a protest anyway, of course, but so different peoples have different ways of, you know, you know of um, expressing themselves, so and I think the different gates - I can't, I can't remember there was a - I can't remember which way around Red and Blue were, but there one of them was very anarchist.

Oh really?

Yeah, and one was very separatist - I can't remember which was which.

When Blue describes themselves, I've interviewed a couple of Blue Gate-rs, they talked about it being a kind of northern, quite working class, lesbian, party.

Oh, really? That Blue? (Laughs).

It was the one nearest the pub, apparently!

What, what about Red? What's Red?

Well, I'd love to find out more about Red. I don't know enough about Red.

Maybe it's the anarchist one?

Yeah. We have got someone, but I haven't interviewed them myself. So I don't know much about Red.

You'll have quite a few Yellows, won't you?

Yeah, quite a few Yellows (laughs).

Yeah.

And it's nice to learn about Green actually, because people mention Green a lot. But I don't think the first person I've spoken to who, who was - who spent most of their time there,

Yeah. I was very outdoors-y, you see, I'd come from a degree in ecology, canoeing in Canada, living right out on the fringes. And then when I came back to do this college thing, I just couldn't handle it couldn't handle civilisation really. So I was gonna end up at Green gate because I was just living like I did in Canada, under, under a piece of canvas. You know, or a bender, which is what I was doing in Canada. So it was home straightaway. I was at home straight away and that sort of environment.

That's nice.

And I think that's what happened. People just gravitated to that, isn't it?

Yeah.

So Blue - my sister would, well, if you do any more interviews, she'd be probably she's just been very busy with this and that, but she'd be up for it, but she's in Brighton. If you do another round of it?

Yeah, I could get her contacts off you - she might, maybe even on the database already. I don't know.

She was very involved with the clause 28, she's always been very, like very active.

Yeah.

So she was very involved with all that stuff in the late '80s. There, the abseiling in the House of Lords, Sue Lawley stuff - she drew the maps for. So she's really hardcore.

Yeah.

So she's become less hardcore, and I've become more focused. So that's where we meet now.

And you said your mum went as well?

Oh, yeah.

What was her experience and what took her there?

I think my sister just took her there. (Laughs). But she's cool, yeah. Sally took her down, and I took her down once - I remember taking her down and car that broke down.

What did she make of it?

She erm, she liked it. She liked, yeah. So she - well everyone's got a different background. She's 83/4now. So, though she had quite a working class parentage, she married my dad and he made money out of computers quite well, even though he had nothing to start with. And they ended up in the Harpenden on - just out of London, in the commuter belt, very kind of middle class staid area, very wealthy, and I hated it. And we all hated it, but we all scattered - the kids, we didn't feel comfortable, but she's still there. And she's got - she got a bit of a reputation for mouthing off - not necessarily acting it out, but really mouthing it off, you know about stuff. But she's still got that reputation now I think.

Oh, brilliant. Did she feel at home in the way that you did at Greenham, do you think?

I've not really asked her. I think she just felt proud that she'd been and, and it enabled her to preach - and my parents were still together at the time, you know. And they divorced maybe about 10 years after that. So, um, yeah, I don't know. I've never really - I've not talked to her much about it.

How did your dad feel about it? Because you were telling me before we started recording that he'd been um, that you had a picture of Spitfire that was his, he'd been to linked to the, his experience in the war.

Yeah.

How did he feel about you - because if he was quite inspired by that sort of stuff, how do you feel about you being at this?

He's very laissez faire.

Oh, okay.

Very 'whatever goes'. He wouldn't have ever gone on any kind of left wing protest. But he wouldn't have ever said anyone else shouldn't either.

Oh really?

Yeah! (Laughs).

Sounds quite nice.

Yeah.

And was there just - were there other siblings?

Oh we have a younger brother.

And how did it...

Interestingly he was, at the time, my sister was in a squat in Islington. And I think she managed to get - buy a flat not long after. But I think at that time, she was still in a in a squat, or in housing association. And he

was in what was definitely a squat at that time. He was he would have been 16/17, er, left home.

So you did all really rebel?

Yeah, yeah, very much. And he was living in his place. I remember he was living in this place, where there was actually actually a hole in the...used to come to this flat with a guy, his best mate from school, they both dropped out. There was a lot of cannabis about, I think, well, I don't think - I don't know if Rhys smoked a lot, but this other guy was completely off his head - and really clever, he ended up in America somewhere. And pigeons used to come in. That's all I remember. I think there'd a fire in this flat, and they just moved in and were living there. And he lived with my sister for a bit as well. But then at that time, that's where he was. Yeah, we all rebelled - we were all out of that. I just knew from being very young - at 12 that you just needed so much money to live there, and what, what was it all about? Depressed (laughs), depressed housewives and men doing something mysterious in suits that involved a lot of money and power. And I thought it's not - that's not for me.

That's really interesting because Greenham's almost, it sort of sets up - there's a reflection of that, but in a way with Greenham - it's not depressed housewives, but it's groups of women taking back space, but there's still this mysterious group of men on the other side of the fence doing whatever they're doing. What were your um, do you have any experiences or stories about any interactions with the men on that side of the fence - either the soldiers or the police or...?

Yeah, there was somebody who was - I remember somebody was like, I had quite good experiences with those guys. Yeah. So quite sympathetic, looking after people. Yeah.

What like?

Somebody was quite agitated and distressed - this woman and they were like, I can't remember, but they were concerned, definitely concerned about this person's safety.

And would that have been the police or the squaddies?

The squaddies.

Right, okay.

Yeah. Also, you know, anecdotally since then, I've been in bands with men who were like, on the other side of the fence, at Greenham. (Laughs).

Oh really, wow. Tell us a bit about that.

It's quite, you know, I play folk music. So, it's actually a guy in Barrow. What's he called now? Gosh, my mind's gone blank. It might come back - anyway.

He was...

He was a squaddie at the time and I, I, I'm not in the main band that I'm in, but I've been in kind of pub fringy Irish kind of bands, what's his name? It might come back to me, I'll tell you. But it doesn't really matter what his name is.

Did you ever ask him what he - what his perception of you guys were on your side of the fence, while he was working inside the base?

I think it were he would have been one of those guys who was just doing - he was just doing his job.

Yeah.

Just doing his job, isn't he? Just a lad out of Barrow. They all want to get out of Barrow, and that's the job.

Right. Okay.

But, you know, as we know a lot of working class, lads - that's the only way they can ever leave home, isn't it?

Yeah.

So they're there because they've left home, and that's their way out.

Yeah.

And they're excited about it in a way - that's their way.

Yeah.

So I don't think, I don't have any particular issue with that. Certainly not now. And even then I didn't find the squaddies - I think the police on the, you know, that's a different matter - more heavy handed.

Really?

Yeah. So, but the squaddies are just wandering about, aren't they - just looking after a bit of wire off a load of women.

That's quite strange. Did you ever talk to them?

Oh yeah, I can't remember any detail, but... I'm quite, I'm quite - I do talk to people anyway. I'd say probably like, I'm not really bothered about who I talk - I don't have too much prejudice to one person to another. I pretty much talk to anyone really. So I did, you know, I don't have a very confrontational style of trying to er, make change happen.

Yeah.

Although is that true? I can. I can think of something I'm involved at the moment, where I'm trying to like - but I kind of work through it, you know. I don't think ultimately, you know, you can meet someone with the same energy, they might have a gun and you might have vicious words, but actually it's the same life state, isn't it? Of er, where you're coming from? Obviously somebody's got more killing power than the other (laughs). But um, and I'm sure there are people on - for a lot of those squaddies that's just their job, isn't it? So, um, and I think I was aware of that at the time, really.

Did you ever meet any of the Americans who - were they different or were they similar to the squaddies, just their job sort of thing?

Um, no, but my sister has a story of cutting through the wire, and I think that's probably what she ended up in Holloway - for jumping on the commandant's bonnet. She'd do anything jumping - up and down on the bonnet! (Laughs).

That's great, I love that image.

Yeah. (Laughs). And the other thing I remember going to court, to watch in - you've probably had other people talk about this, but um, what's the place - new, new...

Newbury?

Newbury, yeah, the magistrates' court. So quite regular court appearances on petty charges. There's something on - there's actually a YouTube clip of something on, erm, of something that was on the news at the time, with quite a posh presenter, and these women just trying to get - and then the confrontation between them - a woman, have you seen that have seen that?

Yeah. I have seen that.

But anyway, some of - I just remember one time, um, so when somebody - when there was a court thing going on, you know, loads of people from camp would be there, outside and inside, filling in the whole place up, inside and out. And um, I just remember the skill of this particular woman, I think she was called Blue. I think she ended up in a caravan somewhere near Ingleton in the late '80s, early '90s - I might have seen her once up in this neck of the woods. And I'd never seen anything as skilled in my life.

What did she do?

She just talked, and she didn't stop.

On the stand, like in the dock?

Yeah, when she, when it was her time to speak, she just - flow of consciousness stuff, and ideas just like, just like she...

To protract the time, sort of thing?

Well, you know you get your say and then someone - but she didn't stop, she just kept on and on - an hour, 90 minutes - on and on and on! (Laughs). And they don't know what to do! She just talked, she never stopped. It was amazing.

What do you think her point was in doing that? Was it just to clog up the process?

Yeah, well clogging the process up which it completely does.

Yeah.

And also to make a - she was making very articulate points to, you know, philosophical and er, you know, er, rational and moral points - skill.

She sort of filibustered them?

That's the thing they do in Parliament isn't it?

It's the thing they do in America - see it in American films.

It comes from somebody in Parliament who did it.

Yes, you're right. You're right. Yes.

A long time ago.

Yeah. To hold up the proceedings.

Yeah, basically she did that. So the whole thing completely clogged, and I'd never seen anything like that. I thought it was so skilled. I was gobsmacked. I just thought that's so amazing.

Yeah.

What a power, what power of words, and using the thing's own process to clog itself up. Very clever.

Because they'd given her the floor sort of thing?

Yeah. And then she just took it as long as it took to clog everything up. But she wasn't just swearing or, or just shouting or - just talking very skilfully about huge, huge, the big, big, big, big picture.

And how long did they have this stop - did she choose to stop in the end?

I can't remember. Maybe they just dragged her out. (Laughs). Probably just, well, there's probably some rule - there'll be a rule about clogging it up. Or, they'll probably invent another charge to do with...

Obstruction of justice...

The court.

Yeah, contempt of court, something like that?

There'd be something. But you probably got to let it go on for quite a long time before you can do that.

That's amazing.

**(Laughs). Then you get the next one in who does the same thing!
(Laughs).**

Brilliant.

It was very clever.

Yeah. It's really impressive.

Has anyone else mentioned that?

No, I haven't had one at all - I've heard oddly, Blue does come up, as a person, and my mother used to talk about Blue as well.

I wonder where she is?

Yeah, well I don't know either. It'd be lovely to - if you're out there, Blue...

My sister might know. She was you know...

But I hadn't heard that story. That's really amazing.

I was...

Yeah, that's impressive. You know, just to go back to that idea that we talked about, you know, when you said the first thing that you went to - what was that meeting was called?

Corroboree, I think it was.

Can you describe the corroboree for us? Because a lot of people listening weren't know how that...

What I remember is is my first time at Greenham was for that, because people at the base camp in London said 'You must come down', because, because there was - it was only me that had never been, really just being a busker, really and hanging out, using their roofs, bringing food along, which is sort of useful, but yeah. So um, there would have been a fire, and there would have been maybe 50/60 people all around. And just discussing stuff. It's an Aboriginal word, I think, an Australian word. I think.

Was it possible for most of those people to have their say?

Maybe it was because this woman Zol - have you picked up about her?

No.

She was from Australia, and I think I came across her because she must have been very engaged with a similar movement. Are you running out of juice? (The recording equipment).

No, I'm fine - just being paranoid about...

Um, I think she - I was very naive and on the fringes basically. But she was obviously an important person, in terms of, I'm just putting it together now. Maybe she'd arrived in London as a representative of a similar movement in Australia.

Ah, okay.

She was always a very strong character, people really looked up to her and respected her. And maybe that, maybe she was part of that, I think. Maybe she was - maybe that's why - because it's an Australian word. And I think it was just, maybe they were taking advice and discussing how to move things forward.

And did it take place at Yellow Gate?

It was somewhere I don't - it wasn't actually on any, as far as I remember, it wasn't like outside a gate, it was like off to the side somewhere.

Sort of neutral space?

Yeah, so somewhere where you weren't going to get bothered by police and trucks and whatever else. And the purpose of the space was to discuss. And um, at the, I remember having an insight, and I was next, I remember Fiona, I remember Fiona was there. And I said to her, that um 'You've got to build, you can't just protest, you've got to build.' So for me, whether that's what we were talking about, generally, but I remember in the process of that evening, having this insight that it's no good just saying 'No', you've got to build a future as well. And I've once spoken to her since. And that pertains to the chanting really, which is about building, building a future as well as, you know, the positive as well as the negative, because very easy, isn't it just to say, just to get negative, from that same life state. So now that, and I was very clear about that, that was one of the big things for me about that evening and about being at Greenham, was I went away with a real clear sense of that you can't - protest is part of it, but you've got to build a future as well.

Got to offer the alternative as well, haven't you?

Yeah, can't just say 'This is no good.' You've got to build what you think is good.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Do you feel other women did that there? Do you feel that came out of Greenham for other people as well?

Yeah, I think that's, I think that that probably came, I think that's one of the main, well, you know, just from who I know, who I'm in touch with who was there and, and um, I think that the value - I think that's one of the main results, or enduring effects of the Greenham movement is that people discovered a the value base, and I think a lot of people I know that's stayed with them throughout their lives. For ,me through this practice I do, but other people anyway, it's like a touch, touch - so like you touch base - it's an interesting word, isn't it? Base camp, the Greenham base - you touch base with something and then you can refer to that throughout your life.

Yeah.

And I know, so I've got a friend at the moment who I was speaking to at the weekend, who's over in Colne, and she was from Lancaster as well. She, because there was a Greenham bus used to come down from - and some of those women now are involved in the anti-fracking those, some older women in the mid 70s, now, are still involved with that in their 70s, yeah. So and they're still in touch now with each other, and getting back involved with it all and it's informed how - they've, the choices they've made in their lives, I think. It's not like you see people - I don't see these people all the time, you know. So like Fiona I've maybe see, three or four times since then, and a friend in Northampton I reconnected with her a couple of years ago, saw her twice, before that was 2000 and before that it was way back. So the kinds of relationships you make that in that way, at that time, they're a reference point or a base in your own life. Aren't they, to reflect back on I think, yeah.

Wow. Did you um - I was sort of going to ask more about the nonviolent direct action, sort of side of it. Um, there was something you said about guns and violent words, and coming from that place. And do you, did you feel like the ethics of nonviolent direct action spoke to you from a

different place? Or was it just something you went along with because that how Greenham operated? Did it have any particular significance for you, or not, really?

I think it's very powerful. I think I was there - there was one where, I didn't really get involved until '84, but there was, I definitely came down from Lancaster on a coach. And there were thousands - I think it might be 5000 people surrounded the base. Do you know about that one?

Embrace the Base?

Yeah, one of those.

There's a few actions.

Yeah, one of those and that was just really powerful.

Yeah.

It was just so, it was incredibly powerful, just to be with that number of people.

Yeah.

That, that number of women you know.

Yeah.

So, what did you ask me?

About nonviolent direct action, specifically whether you kind of felt like that had its own meaning for you, or whether it was just something you kind of were part of because Greenham was doing that?

You mean if I'd thought about it before, worked it through before?

Or whether it was something you could - really connected with when you got there?

It was something I connected with when I got there.

Yeah.

You do feel that power.

Really?

Yeah. And I have been down to the anti-fracking - you know, there's a demo down at Preston.

Yeah.

I went down that in last October - been meaning to get there for ages, but um, I work really hard, it's hard to find the.... And I don't think you have to do these things all the time, so, er, but my - because of my dad dying last April, my sister and I got closer. And we, when she visited me in October for his birthday, even though he wasn't here, we went together down to this, down to the, you know, down to...

That protest?

Yeah. And they were very interested to meet anyone that had been at Greenham - really actively interested for advice, and er...

That's good.

Yeah. Although that's not a women's - but there is a, the women, the Women in White, which are mostly older, Greenham women, Greenham women who were there, so 60s and 70s, every Wednesday, I think they're probably still doing it - for a year or 2, they've been going down and dancing in white outside the main gate of the fracking place.

Really?

Yeah.

I didn't know about that.

If you have a look on their Facebook page, and I think they went even down to the Tory conference this year, and I think they do some kind of vague morris dance stuff. It's hilarious.

That's great!

It is hilarious. How they just do their dance every Wednesday, you know. And then they go to the Tory conference, dressed in white, the suffragette bands on! So it's kind of women's Wednesday, I think down there.

Nice. Could you explain nonviolent direct action for people listening?

Okay, so, er actually, how would I explain it?

Yeah.

Well it's basically (laughs) being there, by, so like, you know, just not engaging with the conflict, which is being there in the way.

Okay.

In a way, in a sense.

So placing yourself where the conflict is, but not - to witness it, but not to engage in it or?

Er, um, making your body be there, but not kind of like - just being in the way - I suppose that's the thing. Being is a big part of it. I haven't really thought about this before. I've no real training in it.

Okay.

They do that now, don't they? You can do it in Kendall, because of this Extinction Rebellion.

Yes.

But, I'd have to say I wasn't terribly involved in the Yellow Gate, where everyone was always sitting down and being moved out the way.

(Laughs). So what did they sit down in the way of?

Er, when, when, when the missiles were coming in and out. Or when the commandant is trying to get out with his car. Mostly to do with the missiles coming in and out.

Yeah. So again to just slow slow everything down...

Yeah.

And make it awkward?

Yeah. So needing to be physically moved by the police without just, you know, without engaging in violent actions towards them.

Yes. Okay.

So...

What's the message of that? Why is that so important? Because that's obviously a big part of the, the camp life, the camp actions.

What is the message? I don't know - in a sense, you see, I think just the word being for me is very important. Being in the way, a human being in the way - it's an interesting word being, isn't it?

Yeah.

Just being in the way without doing, in a sense.

Existing there?

Yeah. And that all ties in with the fact that, you know, the feeling of that being there was that you were important because you were alive, being there alive, you know. So you just, that's enough.

Yeah.

Don't have to do anything else.

And the thing about the importance.

So that leads - yeah, yeah. So, and the value of that individual value of the individual.

Yeah.

What they can do just by being there. Rather than needing to even say anything, or, sometimes you don't need to, do you?

No, it's true.

Um, or engage in any physical confrontation. I mean, that's obviously the point. That's what it means.

Yeah.

But...

Would that have changed if it had been men as well? Was, was there anything about it being a woman any space?

Well, I think that's why it became women only, because it's less likely to you know, male authority figures were less likely to confront women. And, you know, though I'm sure it happens. But so the difference was, it's definitely true. It's like you can see if you go down to to Preston North Road, some of the guys there are just out for fight, you know, it's really obvious.

Right.

And it would have been the same at Greenham 'til it became a women only space. Which isn't to say that there aren't women who are out for a fight as well. Generally, less.

Yeah.

It's a generalisation, but less. Yeah.

Was there anything else about it being a women only space that you think is of value to...

It just felt safe. Much safer.

Really? That's interesting.

Yeah. In every way, I think women, as well for me, women only spaces always feel safer in every way or at any time.

So when you say every way, not just physically - do you mean like in terms of how you can - what other ways, like contributing your ideas, or what other ways?

Um, physically, sexually, um, er, just - um, well, just every, every way really. So women are - as a generalisation - because there's definitely, I saw a fight, you know.

Oh really?

Yeah. Someone had a go at me once, so it does happen - just because....

Humans?

Yeah, but there's just a tendency isn't there - women that are less likely to threaten in that way, I think.

Yeah.

It still happens.

I gave a talk at a WI the other day, which is not all - obviously I'm not saying these are the same things as Greenham, but women only space is quite rare. And this was a room of 130 just women. And when I was being given a lift back by one of them, she's very nice and she was saying how much she likes - we were both saying how much we like to talk in front of just women, and give talks for just women. And she said, as soon as you're in front of men, you know they're looking at you and judging you about that, without listening yet - before they've even listened, if they even listen. And I sort of said yes, you really feel like a human talking to the humans, when you when you're a woman talking to other women. And I just feel like that might have been a big part of Greenham? Don't know if that...

Yeah, definitely. It wouldn't at all have been the same if there had been men there.

Do you think?

But they did find their role. Well, no, I just wouldn't. It did start as a mixed camp, didn't it?

Yes.

And it became...

The march was mixed, wasn't it?

It became women, but men did find a role bringing stuff.

Okay.

Yeah, like bringing supplies.

So like fire wood and food and things like that?

Yeah, yeah. Great! (Laughs). Long may it last! (Laughs).

Were there some men that didn't fit that, or was it just - what were the local, did you encounter anything from the locals that was either supportive or negative?

I didn't really - not personally, no. I remember everyone's distress when the big men used to come on a - the munchers...

Bailiffs and evictions?

Yeah, well just throw everybody's stuff in the back of the bin van and stuff, so um, so where are we?

Oh, that's, that's probably...

The locals - I wasn't there intensely enough for, you know, like month in month out...

To kind of have more of that?

I didn't get the pub ever I just hung out at Green Gate. And then I came down from Lancaster for these times. I was there New Year '85, that's

where this photo comes from, actually. And I think I did go through the fence that on that occasion - loads of people did. So many people did they didn't even bother to charge you. They just arrested everyone, and let them go again kind of thing - no consequences ever occurred from that for me. I was arrested. I think it must been quite a - so that's January '85.

What's the format to a new year's event like that? Was there a party element to it?

Just everyone was chopping through the fence and running around inside, as far as I remember.

What was the reaction on the base to that?

I think it was just too many to do have done anything - they just chuck them back out again. I did get arrested, but nothing, never got charged with anything.

No.

I think it had quietened down. Maybe they'd just got more used to it all - I don't really know. So my sister, like the hardcore lot, who were probably doing that at first, I think everyone just cottoned on and loads more people were doing it - just like a bit routine, really.

Yeah.

Rather than pioneering!

Do you think there are things about Greenham that were pioneering? What would you say the pioneering things are about it?

Um, probably the first women only peace camp, is it?

I don't know.

I don't really know that but I have a sense it must have been.

It certainly stands out as a pretty huge and important one, doesn't it?

Yeah. The fact that it was lead - you know leaderless, it was leaderless - that really confused the authorities.

Oh, really?

Yeah 'cause they're like, you know, they're trying to like find - if they can get hold of this one it will stop. That was all this corroboree stuff was all about - it was everybody had their say, everybody, there was nobody telling anyone.

No.

I'm sure now that this woman Zol, who had come over from Australia, that that was why that evening was happening.

Right.

Yeah, to sort of gain her experience, and share how to move, how to move things forward from the, from whatever - so there might have been something going on in Australia at the same time, I've never looked into it. I've never really made that connection until this moment, really.

That's interesting, isn't it?

Yeah.

'Cause I know that Greenham women also went off and did that in other countries.

Yeah.

In America and Russia.

And then into the miners' strike and stuff as well.

Yeah, absolutely. Other, other protests in this country and other communities.

There was play on about miners - on the radio this afternoon. Did you -

Really? No.

Anyway. Set at the same time - '84.

That's really interesting,

As I was driving down.

So if, that's actually that's a really nice kind of like, because we were talking on the way here about all the different plays, and depictions there have been of Greenham - none of which I found terribly satisfying so far, but, you know, we all have our own version of what we want to say or see.

Oh, the plays, you mean the stuff that's been put on out of it so far?

Yeah and any art - what I'm thinking is if you saw, if you're gonna have, if you thought Greenham was made into art now, what do you, what form would you want that to take?

If it was gonna be made into - I think a play is always going to be very, well you see it was such a broad thing, so many thousands of people, everyone's got their own perspective. If you have a play - of necessity, quite narrow in who's point of view it's going to portray.

You have to pick up perspective, don't you?

Then you've got, really to decide basically what you're going to say for your play, and then pick what you...

Yeah, who fits that.

Especially who you talk to. I think um, I always find photographic, er - just me - visual the most, probably the most powerful.

And what are the visuals that you would pick out that say Greenham to you?

I think the diversity of women, and the number and the diversity. I think that's what makes it so significant.

Are there any key moments or snapshots that are very evocative of Greenham for you? What makes you think of Greenham?

That one when I came, so it'll be sometime early '85. And when I came down on the coach from Lancaster - when there were thousands and thousands and thousands, thousands women all tying things on this fence.

Oh, really?

Tying things that meant something to them, about their kids or, or about life generally, and leaving. So the whole place was then, you know, the whole fence was decorated the whole way round. How many miles is it round?

Nine, I think.

Yeah. How many thousand people would you need to get right down in then?

Well, I think Embrace the Base is 30,000.

Yeah.

And I think they had actions at some point - I'm not sure when, it went up to the biggest 70,000.

Well, it could have been one of them I'm talking about, then. Because it got to be more than 5000 to get round. And of-course, you don't actually know if you're there, if there's someone all the way around. And I think we walked around it as well. I can't remember, but I know that the whole base, was the whole fence was decorated the whole way around. Quite amazing. Coaches from all over the place. And oh yeah, my friend who I'm seeing, who might confer Easter, who's in Colne now, um, she was like - there was a kind of whole phone network across the country as well. You must know about that?

Yeah, my mom was part of it.

Yeah, so her, her shop - she had a shop in Lancaster called Miss Mundane. Viv - she's great, she trained as an actor not long after. She, she was - her shop was kind of Lancaster HQ. So that was she, and she's, and she's completely keyed into when - she talks about her friend in Kendall, it's somebody that was, that she knew from Greenham, from the Greenham movement that's informed her - social, not day to day, but the base, the roots of her social networking for life really, is from that time, and I think that's true for a lot of women. Yeah.

Yeah. I've definitely heard that from other women too.

Yeah.

If you, do you, could you explain why you think it's important that Greenham is remembered by subsequent generations - if you think that is important?

Um, because it worked! (Laughs).

(Laughs). That's a great, great answer.

So I think it worked personally in people's lives, you know, through making these bonds that then they've relied on at significant times in their lives. It's worked, because there's no cruise missiles, you can say it wasn't direct cause and effect. Who can prove that really?

Yeah.

That's not provable.

No.

And it's worked for me personally, because of er, that's where I did - first chanted 'Nam Myo Ho Renge Kyo', these words that had this, and then I discovered there's an international network, I was one of the first people in north to get involved with that network, and it's, um, you know, an NGO - it's been part of the ICAN, it's been the - so this Buddhist movement, SGI that I'm involved with, this was big, you know that this - the ICAN, what does it stand for?

I don't know.

I don't know.

Sorry!

Okay, so it's just been awarded the Nobel Prize.

Oh, then I should know - can see why you asked me!

It's the thing about, it's the thing about, I should know, before I say, but it's the thing about um, countries signing up to ban nuclear weapons.

Ah. Okay, yeah. Ah, okay. Yes, that's something we should both know!
(Laughs).

Yeah. Have a Google!

Listeners, have a Google!

So, um, it's that kind of connection really with - so I've not really been involved with any other, well I'm on the, I'm interested in supporting them, but I've lived quite an upside down life, you know, my kind of um, I'm busier at 60 than I've ever been - in terms of work. So um, I'm not at liberty to - and also I'm about building rather than protesting, now, at that point, so. Um. So, what am I trying to say - I've forgotten what I'm trying to say.

You, I think you'd moved, I was asking you about why it's important subsequent generations to know about it, and you've moved through your answer to saying why, your last point was that it was important.

Yeah, personally.

For your personal life.

Yeah, because it's basically there I learnt the tool that I've used every day, that I use all the time to resolve issues in my mind, and to work with others for peace. That's what I'm trying to say.

That's brilliant, that's lovely.

So that's where I learned, yeah my way.

(Edit in recording).

This is a tune called The Run Ashore, and I made it for my dad when he was not long to live. And because he's made - his mate in the Navy used to go and visit him and slap him on the shoulder 'Fancy a run ashore, Edgar, he's stuck in the bed, drop of rum?'

(Plays solo, folk style, fiddle piece.)