

Peggy Seeger

So my first question probably er, is just to say, could you tell us about how you, how you got to Greenham - what did you, how come you went to Greenham?

Now, how did I hear of it? Err, to the actual Greenham Common itself, I think, oh I know how I got to hear about it, no, I know exactly. I think it was Melksham, I'd have to look at my book just to check. It was a town that began with M. And we were asked by a women's committee of some sort - I can't remember exactly who - to come and sing to this caravan that was going through that had started in Wales. And so we went along, and we booked a place to stay overnight - we had our daughter with us Kitty. And she would have been about 10 or 11. She was born in 1972. So this would be '82, well probably more into the '80s. So we went along and we set ourselves up on the stage. And the march came in. And it was men and women then, and women with, with strollers - prams carrying, and there were toddlers, little ones. And they all sat down, and they were dirty, and they were exhausted. And we gave them a concert. Err, we didn't charge - that was part of what we did. We either worked for a fee, or for nothing. And I remember a huge number of them fell asleep. And I was so pleased! (Laughs). They were just exhausted. And they'd stopped - it was a late afternoon concert, somewhere between - at about tea time. And err, then when they settled at Greenham Common itself, I went down because it was, it was in the newspapers everywhere. I think that was how I probably found, found out where they were - because we knew where they were going. But they didn't know what to do when they got there. They didn't know what they were going to do. Some of them chained themselves to the fence. A huge tent was donated, and I mean, it was enormous. It was about as big as maybe from probably the, the whole space of this house would have fitted into it. And there were beds all around, or things on the floor. There was a cooking area, and there was a place where everybody sat around a little fire, and everything was done in there. And there were always journalists at the door err, asking to speak

- I remember one particular one, and this was the routine - the journalist comes in, and it was a wide entrance. I do remember you that, you could see out quite quite a lot. And there were some kind of things that provided light on the top, that maybe that you could open up when it was good weather. Maybe it wasn't as big as I remember. But it was enormous. And it was in unbelievable disorder. Because people had donated old sofas, and they'd donated old mattresses - and it was all donations. And err, journalists would park - this was by the big gate, the enormous gate - the one that's in all the films, the one that's in the film about them. You've seen it.

Yeah.

I love that.

I love that.

And it was just to the left of that. And so you'd park your car over there. And there was an outside cooking area too. Inside only for if there was problems. And the outside area was - people brought logs, they brought charcoal, they brought pots and pans, they brought traveling ovens and things. So it was it was set up. And there was always a huge pot of something doubtful. And so whenever we went down - I went down when there was still men there, because at the beginning there were men. And I remember we got really pissed off because the men sat around. A lot of them didn't do a bloody thing. And there were a lot of women who really just - there were women who tried to tidy up. Err, there were women who just threw everything wherever it landed. But the men lounged for the most part, and finally they were kicked out. And all, and this is going to be a women's camp. I don't know who decided that. It's possible it could have been Helen John, she was very strong. And I think she came very early on. Now it might be folklore, but did she leave her husband and children?

Yes, she did. Yeah.

Yeah. That was amazing. And then she just parked herself there. And there were women of every possible sort, possible age. There were young girls who had run away from home - who their parents would come and get them. Um, and, and it was very hard to keep clean. They had a portable toilet. Um, but there were woods - I don't know if this area was cleared, but the tent was put up very quickly. Because I'm not sure that the people who marched from Wales - I'm not sure they brought anything. I know they had been put up on the way, but there got to be so many of them by the time they got to Melksham, our concert there were people everywhere, you know, people standing, people hanging from the banisters, it was in some kind of old Town Hall. And um, I'll have the details of it somewhere in my program books, but those are in an archive. Um, so I went down there and stayed for 3 nights.

Did you stay at the camp or...?

Oh no, I stayed at the camp. I stayed there. One of the nights that I went there, there wasn't a free mattress. And I went was with my friend from the nuclear, um anti-nuclear power group that we had - BANG, it was called: Beckenham Anti-Nuclear Group, which ran for about 5 or 6 years - educating people on the nuclear waste that went through our town Beckenham. And I remember one memorable night Marian and I, and an American songwriter named Dave Lipman - there's no place to sleep. So somebody who had come in an estate car put all the seats down. And there's me, and Dave, and Marian just squeezed in like - and it was a hilarious night. Because you couldn't sleep, but one person turned over, everybody had to, you know, dump-de-dump-de-dump! But err, a journalist would come and he would - it was usually a he, that I remember - would ask, you know 'Who, who's the leader here?' And whoever they talked to said 'Well, you know, I'm Joan, and I'm here because so and so, but you have to ask you know, Jane why she's here.' So he'd go to the next one 'But, who's the leader?' There was no leader. And Helen John did not speak for everybody. She didn't do that. She helped with the organisation, err, the administration and with err, there had to be collections of money, because they had to go out and get

groceries. So this long tables outside - where there was a fire that was almost as big as an oil can - something always bubbling on it. So I went down - oh, eight or nine times I can't remember how many times by myself, and you just park, and you'd come in and you look around and see what had to be done. If trash had to be taken up to the garbage - to the local dump, you'd pile it into the car, and off you'd go with it. Or they put a great pile of potatoes or carrots or something, say these need peeling. So we'd peel. And that was that was fine. The worst part was cleaning the pots, the cooking pots that nobody had bothered to clean - because people had brought so many cooking pots that sometimes instead of cleaning the old one, you just left it in a pile, and then you used another one. Um, so but I, I got really - my hands were like worker's hands, they were all you know (laughs), you can tell when you shake the hand of somebody who does really hard outside work - that's what my hands were like. Um, but I couldn't bear to see the pots just sitting there - they're dirty.

Were people relatively friendly when you arrived? Or was it, was it quite different experiences of reception at the camp?

Well it's just - there were always people arriving. And err, you had to kind of suss it out yourself. There was no reception committee. And you didn't say 'What shall I do?' You'd look around and you'd have to see, but you know, we were women - we could see what needed doing. But on the whole people dressed in old t shirts and big walking boots. And I was down there once for 2 or 3 days. And I must admit, I don't like camping out. If I'm going to camp, I want it to be neat and clean, and du-du-du, and they were having a meeting about how they would do such and such and such. And they were all dressed in big boots and du-du-du-du-du, and it's easy to say oh, this is a bunch of lezzies. And one of the people there was this most absolutely gorgeous woman girl. She must have been about 22. And she was dressed in nothing but white. And she had long hair and she had the most beautiful face. And she kind of coasted in among everybody. I mean, the lesbians were drooling, (laughs), drooling. But it wasn't a lesbian camp. I didn't get that sense at all when I was there - there were some couples, but nobody made a

fuss about it. It was not definitely not a ruling kind of um, always present in your face. What it was, was a bunch of strong women who - you weren't allowed to lounge about, you know, things had to be done. There were always things to be done. Because there were people dropping by with, with things. So there was a corner in the tent for clothes, and you had to sort those out. Um, there was, and there was blankets. And the food that people brought, some of it was absolutely crazy - they brought up a big gallon of ice cream. So we all tucked into that. Oh, we finished it. Everybody with their spoons in. And so there were a lot of donations. And I can't remember if that gate was very close to the road.

Did you spend time at different gates? Or did you have one that you went to?

Oh yeah, yep, yeah. There were nine gates. I think there were nine. There were named after colours, as you know. Um.

Do you remember anything about - did the colours suggest different personalities?

Of the gates?

Yeah, were they different or was it quite similar at each one?

Well, the ones that were next to roads generally had the most women, because that was protection. And there were always people driving by, and there was people driving by giving you the finger and yelling at you. But for the most part people would drive by - a lot of them would drive by and they'd honk, and they'd you know, give fingers up, you know? Thumbs up. And occasionally people would stop and put money in a pot. Because you'd take money whenever it would come in. So the life at the camps - there was quite a lot of sitting around. There weren't a whole lot of guitars, I don't think - so when I turned up with a guitar, they liked that. But they didn't make a fuss of me as a person that was more known than they were. That didn't happen. You just tucked in and did -

and did. Um, but the, but the kitchen duty was - you just - and nobody had any rubber gloves. So I went out and bought myself some rubber gloves. But the minute I laid them down anywhere they were whisked away - they're gone. You didn't - the idea of personal property - I don't know how they managed it. Because women in their home space, and it was a home space - we made it into a home space, you had your little corner. I think I slept in the car for 2 nights. Don't remember more than 1 night sleeping in the tent. I remember nights sleeping out in the sleeping bag. And one of the ones I remember - because I was, I was able to then - it would kill me now. That was once at a very big gate, err, one side of it would have been about the size of that wall. And it would just open up (makes expansive noise) like this. And we slept next to the gate. And when somebody had to come in or out, you had to move - you have to roll away in your sleeping bag. Because the idea was to stop things going in, and stop things going out. I remember waking up this one morning with this great big pair of boots right there. And a littler pair of boots. And the big bit boats, they started nudging me, you know, and then a woman's voice said 'Don't don't do that. You'll get your boot dirty.' Yeah, it was a woman - there was a woman and a man. Yeah.

Were they the military police, or were they the army, do you think?

Do you know, I never asked. I don't think they were Military Police. Um, but - and you'd sit all day with your back against this fence, all lined up like sitting down sparrows all along it. And when a car came in, um, you'd sit there and then the police would drag you away. And then you just go back and sit the minute the gate was closed. Err, so you got dragged quite a lot, so you wore clothes that you could be dragged in. Um.

And what was the idea behind that? Because that's nonviolent direct action, the principles the camp were sort of run by. What was the...

The purpose was to make it difficult for the camp to run.

Okay.

You know, and to say, and you know there was an American camp inside with the schoolchildren in there - women - whole families were in there. It was nine miles around the outside, it was huge. It was the longest runway in Europe in its time, you know. And as I understand it, it was commandeered - it was common land. And it was commandeered during the Second World War as an airbase. But this is just as I understand that, you'd have to - and it was with the agreement with the, with the country, that um, and Americans were here then, that after 29 years, it would be returned to the country. But of-course, it wasn't. And that, that was when they - it did have the little picket fence to start with. And you could just climb over it, if you chose, at the beginning, except for these great big - now come to think of it, by the time I went, it was only the backwoods that had the picket fences - around where the big gates were, the gates were very high. There were about two thirds the height of this room, something like that. So that would make them about 9'.

So did they change the fence because the camp had grown up around the base?

Oh, yeah and they changed it into this - it's not called chain link, maybe it is called chain link, I don't know - this green, interlocking fence that looks like a lot of squares.

Yeah, green squares.

Yeah, what is the name for that? I'm missing it. And they ended up putting nine miles of that down.

Wow! But that didn't keep women out either did it?

And where that went through swamps, and blackberry and bramble sections, nobody was going to go in there. But when we went round it - Irene and me, one day - it took a whole day to go around.

Oh really?

Because it was up and down, round and round. And they said it was nine miles around. And that may be folklore too. I know it was bloody long. There was a kind of funny little path that was next to the fence. So I think that had been made by the people who put the fence up. Or who knows, maybe by patrolling women, I have no idea. Um, but it was at the main areas that were anywhere near the road, er, it became this chain link fence. And then it was something else - it had razor wire put up on the top. And by the time they were finished, there was then a walkway, about maybe 6' wide that the soldiers would walk with dogs back and forth.

Did you ever engage with them at all?

Hold on.

Oh, sorry.

And every so often there would be a guard post. So when we first went, there was no personnel on the other side of the fence. They were there at the gates, but they were not patrolling parts of the fence. And this one camp, this one night when we were there, there would have been about maybe a dozen and a half, two dozen of us there because it was night. Because Irene and I used to go down for night watch. So we'd stay awake all night, while the day watch got - went to sleep. And they would fold up very quickly into there. And some of them had a little tiny one one people tents, - putput tents. And I remember seeing this scene, and I don't think it was a gate, this one - I really don't think so. But it had a a guard cubicle, quite, quite high. And there was soldiers marching back and forth with dogs tk-tk-tk -tk, back and forth. And on the other side of this walkway was another fence.

Oh!

Yes. So by the time we left, there was this fence with razor wire on the top. Then there was a walkway. And these were probably put at the areas that were easily accessible to the women, because the women find out to go over a razor, razor wire, you just throw a mattress up there, you know and then you're over. You know, there's, there's pictures of it. And of-course a lot of the razor wire, it's like the razor wire at Buckingham Palace. When you try to get over it, it rolls.

Oh, okay, yeah.

It rolls. So you can't grab hold of anything even if you would want to with razor wire. Um, so the other fence on the other side of us was high too. (Laughs)... when they got over, they took their mattress. Yeah, so one of my enduring memories, and it was night and here's the, here's the campfire, and we're sitting around trying to keep warm - I get cold very easily. The endless cups of tea, endless cups of tea and you had, you had evaporated milk, because that wouldn't go, you know. And keeping track of trash was really something, and what you had - because the minute anything was thrown down, because you could be taken for littering. They looked for all kinds of reasons to get rid of this. And you had to be a certain amount of room away from the road. And you got real a feeling of what it must have been like to be a gypsy or a traveller. So this particular night, there's two or three soldiers with a dog. And Rebecca is standing - she had flaming red hair. And she was standing holding the fence like this. And she was singing her nightmare. She was spontaneously singing, the nightmare of nuclear war.

Wow!

It was quite extraordinary. I'm a musician, I'm a songwriter. But I don't know that I would have been able to write anything like that, much less sing it. And it was musical. And it was poetic. It was immediate. And the soldiers were just like this. And one of the purposes - um, one of the things that everybody tried to do was to engage the soldiers on a personal level. Talk to them about their wives and children and their

lives and, and the soldiers at the beginning - they talked, they were soon told not to.

Why do you think they were told not to? What effect was it having do you think?

Oh, it was making them understand that we were like their wives, their sisters, their, their, you know, their daughters. And most of them probably had no idea - they're just doing what they're told.

Yeah.

Because men like to do this. That's why they all march like this. You see all these phalanxes of soldiers that are like a cog in a machine, or what! What kind of brain does this? What kind of? I'm listening to a book called 'The Wall' now by John Lanchester. It's about the future. And you can either be a defender or you can be a breeder. And the wall is 95,000 kilometres long or something like that. And the defenders are defending it. Why do men do what they do? And um, I have feelings about that, that I won't put down here because I have two sons, and I had a husband, and I had a father, and I don't think any of them would have marched, but, but is it just for companionship? Is just because there's nothing else to do? Is it because you get food and clothing and you don't have to take any decisions? You just do what you're told. Um, so maybe that's why the soldiers stopped talking to us because they were told not to. But for the most part, I remember them talking. And er, you, you you didn't exhibit - you didn't feel as if you wanted to be aggressive towards them. You know, they were having a miserable life - and pouring down with rain. And they're having to march with the dogs and, and who knows - there would undoubtedly be some of them who loved the job. But on the whole they didn't seem to. Um, I remember one night at that particular gate, that's - we came and we went, and we came and we went - because I got ill one of the nights that I stayed out, so I decided not to stay out and sleep out anymore. So we went and we stayed at something like a Travelodge. And Irene and I weren't partners then, we were friends. And I remember going to a Little Chef, and er

being, they really didn't like having you in there, because you got dirty at the fire - fire was, you wanted to get close to the fire but it made you dirty.

And the smell of the wood smoke?

The smell of the wood smoke.

It's a give away, isn't it?

Yeah. And um, this particular night, um a couple of cars came up, and they seemed quite nice. And they'd brought blankets. And they'd brought little chairs to sit on. And it was not me - somebody else said 'I'm sorry, you're not allowed to join us. There's no room at the fire in trade for blankets.' And then they got aggressive.

Were these guys?

Yeah, got - they said 'Does your husband know you're here? Does your mother know you're here? No nice women will do things like this.' Now, the last time I heard that was when I was traveling through Northern France on a scooter with a friend of mine when I was 21. And we were on a scooter, banjo, guitar, two knapsacks. And we were travelling out to Brittany, and we got caught in the rain, and we sheltered in a barn where there were some French peasant farmers, and they were peasants at that time. I'm talking about 1956. Wait a minute, that would be 1957, '58 - 1958 in the summer. And it would have been probably July or August, because I just got pregnant. And they were very curious about us. And they said 'Does your father know you're doing this? Did you know, do your brothers - where are your brothers? You know, nice French girls don't do this.' But they gave us fruit and vegetables. And we went on our way - but they were very nice with it. But these men were aggressive. And er, we took the blankets and they drove off. But these days when there's so much, really aggressive and killing of women, it's a wonder no Greenham women were killed. It is a wonder. Because I think two or three of the gates were quite close to roads.

One, one girl was killed actually.

Was she?

She was hit by an army truck. Yeah.

Oh!

Yeah. Yeah, she was really young as well.

She's our Emily Davidson.

Sorry?

She's our Emily Davidson.

Yes, absolutely. And people - other Greenham women tried very hard to get to find out who's responsible, and get prosecutions, but it never got very far. But then she's well remembered and very documented, and loved by the women.

Right. But there were quite a lot of um, almost classes, there were discussions - and then sometimes, you know, real, you know, battling about how to deal with things. But there were a number of very, um - women who, I don't even remember who this particular one was, but she was extraordinary. This was one of the big gates, the one that we sat er - I'll tell you a funny story about that too. It's the one where I was, you know, nudged by the policeman's boot. So I must have slept there 3 or 4 nights. And it's hard to stay clean, when there's that - there's no place to go. And right across the road, there were people's houses. And they didn't invite you in to have a shower. No, they didn't do that. I don't know how or when we got ourselves clean. But there was quite a lot of coming and going at this.

(Doorbell rings. Edit in tape)

So there's traffic passing by. And there's a police van - they often had, it's - one of these - it's a van with seats on this side, seats on this side, and it opens out from the back. And so there were seats for four or five of them. I don't know how it was safe in any way for them to travel in. Maybe it was the ones they were going to haul us into, I have no idea. There wasn't a Black Maria. And there were nearly always they were sitting there with the doors open. And um, we're sitting with our backs to the fence, and this motorcycle comes up (makes engine noise), and it stops. Err, and it's a boy on a motorcycle with a message for us. And a policeman strides up to it and says 'You've got to move that motorcycle', and there is no place to put it. He says 'Well I've just come from...' and they start battling, they start shouting at each other - these two men. And one of the Greenham women, she just walks up to them, and she says 'Officer, thank you, you're doing your job really well. You know, there's a lot of traffic here. We really have to worry about this.' And then she turned to the other man, and she must have made up his name, I have no idea. And she said 'Jack that's really nice. You got that message here really quickly.' So um, there's no (an alarm beeps). I'll repeat it. So she complimented both of them on doing their job - 'Jack, you know you'll have to move this, but there is no place for you to park, so you'll have to move on. And thank you for getting it here so quickly.' And it's the whole atmosphere just went right down like that. I mean, they were ready to have a fistfight, these two men.

How clever of that woman.

Yeah. Yeah, it was.

And brave.

Yeah, it was, it was excellent. She just came back and sat down. It was, it was a right lesson. And I forget what gate that was. But it was one that I definitely sat with my back against that gate - it was hot, and it was July, must have been July or August. And so there's a whole bunch of it's just sitting there. Dum de dum dum, like sparrows on the wire. And

we had this song we sang - you heard the song 'Old and strong?' Yeah, so we're singing (sings) 'Old and strong. She goes on and on and on. She's like a mountain, old and strong.' And we're just sitting there just chanting this. And the police are laughing at us, and fine. Then somebody started this, and I don't know who it was, but it was absolutely brilliant. And the drift was that one of us would be the leader, but not obviously - somebody with a strong voice. You'd start humming. (Hums). And everybody along the line would pick it up. (Hums). And then this leader would change (hums at different pitch) to any note (hums at different pitch). And the others would just get there as quickly as they could. 'Aaaah', do you guys sing?

Er, yeah, I can sing.

Do you sing?

Not, not Christina as much.

You don't have to just hum. (Hums). Hum it. (Hums at different pitches and others follow). You see how quickly you get. So when this was going on for probably 30 or 40 minutes. And there was these guys sitting in there, the police sitting in the back of their van, and it's open. And they're very quiet listening to all this. And one of them come - gets gets out, and he comes over and he says 'How do you remember all that?' And we said 'No, we're making it up. We just make it up.' And he went back, and he sat down, and they slammed the door of their vehicle. And then the vehicle began to rock, and they were singing (sings raucously) 'Dada, dada, dada, dada, dada, dada, dada, dada.' And the vehicle is just going from side to side. And after a couple of minutes, they got tired of that. And it was also hot in there. And they opened up the back of it, and sat there while we're still going (hums). It was an absolute hoot!

Were they trying to sort of compete with you? Or were they just trying to drown you out, do you think?

No, I don't know what they were trying to do. They were probably trying to say, well, we have songs too. And it was sad in a way.

Yeah.

You know, um it was sad. But in a concert, I can get an entire audience doing that. It's so quick. Everybody just gets there right quickly, you know.

It's lovely.

And they're astounded that they do that. And you would also transfer the leadership and say 'Okay, your turn now Samantha, you lead', so Samantha would take over. And they never knew who - there was no obvious leader. So I thought that was fabulous. I don't know who dreamed that up. But boy, it was good.

Yeah, that's lovely.

Because you needed something to do. You know. You needed something to do. But that woman walking over to the officer, and the, and the young man who brought the message - because men were welcome to bring the messages then. They had walkie talkies too, you know that? From one gate to the other. There was nearly, there was always somebody on each of the gates with a walkie talkie.

Do you mean a Greenham woman?

A Greenham woman. Oh, yes.

Because my mum always told me that the men at Greenham, if they visited, they were never allowed the walkie talkies.

Well women had them.

Yeah

We had a - there was somebody at every gate. So you knew when it was coming out.

Ah, okay.

You know, and you could walk to a gate where there was - where they needed sustenance. I have never had a look at a map of Greenham, but I don't know how big the common was. But there were quite a lot of areas where it was right along next to a road, apart from when Irene and I walked, there was quite a lot that wasn't. And there were women at every gate, the little gates that were in the bracken forests, those were interesting, you know, two or three women just sitting there.

That must have been a very different atmosphere to the bigger camps?

Hm, yes it was, yes it was, but you could communicate all the way around. This is Red Gate, what's happening at Blue Gate, at Green Gate, Black Gate, White Gate - colours, they were colours. So the organisation of it, but the organisation wasn't - but maybe I just wasn't down there enough. I've seen films of there being disagreements as to how it should be run.

Yeah.

And you know, we're women, we all like our kitchen. You know. But the first time I went to the camp was when I came back with Carry Greenham Home in my head. That was the big camp, a big camp that still had, had men in it, but it was almost all women.

And did you have that title from the women themselves, or the camp?

No. No, no, no.

So they got that. Because lots of women in the interviews have mentioned - talked about Carry Greenham Home and the ethics of

carrying Greenham home with you. Did they get that from your song title?

Do you know, I don't know. I don't know. Can't remember.

Symbiotic?

Mm. Yeah. But what an extraordinary thing. I went to the Seneca camp in New York. Er, that would be in late, mm when would that be? That would have been in the late '80s. Let's see, Ewan was still alive then. And he died in '89. So it might have been '86/'87. The Greenham Common, energised the women of Seneca, which is - there's a big airbase there. And we went along to that - my son, Callum and I went along to that, to um, see what it was like and it was nothing like Greenham. They actually had, they actually had a house.

Oh!

Where a lot of the, and they had men there, is wasn't...

How do you think that changed it? What was the dynamic like with there being men there?

I wasn't there long enough to know. I wasn't there long enough to know. But I do remember when we were on our way out. There was a big broken down truck that was bringing supplies to the camp. So Callum, and I stopped and asked if we could help in any way. And there was this guy with his head down in the, you know, trying to fix this, and fix that. And a bunch of women came along, they just came strolling over from the camp. And they're standing there. And he says 'Hold this, you know hold this da da da da da.' And this one woman steps forward she says 'What's wrong? And he looked and said 'Well, it won't start, ma'am.' Um, de de de he was the driver. And she says 'Well, what happens when you turn..', and he was very impatient with her. And he said 'Da de da de da de da.' And she said 'Well, let me have a look.' And somehow she got up there. He got down. She got up there. And she was poking

about and she says 'Oh, it's da de da de da de da de da.' And she said, 'Go get me such and such, Mary de da de da.' So Mary goes back to the house, and brings such and such - a tool or something like that. And she's just in there like this. And she fixed it. And these men are standing around like this. But she practically had her whole body inside this big truck.

But she did fix it.

She fixed it.

That's great.

I thought it was wonderful. You know, and there will come a time when we don't think that's extraordinary. But back then, especially as she was extremely good looking, had lovely long hair, which she tied up like this, you know, and she was young and well built. And these men are just standing there - probably enjoying the look of her butt, no idea - but she fixed it. But Seneca, one of the reasons I was - it, it felt like a different atmosphere because of the men. And it was right near a very belligerent town that did not want them there because the town had a lot of it's - a lot of its income from the soldiers, and from the airbase being there, and they really resented the women. So the women at camp decided to go on mass to the town, and talk to the people and the townspeople got news of this. And they were telling me the story and they were laughing like drains. They said 'There's a bridge, you have to go over a bridge to get into the town.' And she said 'So there's the women coming, and they're singing, and the townspeople are marching - bum bum be dum ba dum', and they're saying 'Nuke them, nuke them, nuke them!'

Slightly short-sighted! (Laughs)

Nuke this camp. What?!

Which is on their doorstep.

On their doorstep. And the women told us this story, and they're all laughing, and the spirit was very nice, but they weren't up for visitors.

Right.

And in a way, Greenham wasn't up for visitors who came to look, um, you know, kind of political tourists. That's a good term, I like that.

Yeah, it's nice. I love that.

You can steal it. The fact that it was just women, um, it had a funny feeling of being you know, you weren't being watched, you weren't being guided to do things, there was - everybody did everything. If someone turned out to be better at this or that, then that person say got fixing torches or, you know, checking spark plugs. If you had a car, you were immediately welcome. Then you'd go off to one of the supermarkets, and we'd pile it full of stuff. But on the whole people - a lot of food was brought by, by locals and people who drove down. People came from far away to be part of it. There weren't any children after the first, you know, you know the woman who started it - and she should be hopefully remembered exactly as to who she was. She just put her kids into a pram and started marching. But um, a spin off from Greenham was er, when you, when you didn't go to the camp, there were things you could do. Because the Greenham women would send out to satellite groups. They'd say 'Cruise is out today.' You know what that meant?

Cruise Watch.

Yeah. So we used to stand on the A21 with leaflets, and we put the leaflets out ourselves - our group did. And you'd stand at the traffic lights, and when the traffic lights went red, you would hand out these to - and virtually you would have to say 'You know that if cruise missiles came along here, you would - this road would be closed. Do you know how long a cruise missile - what do they call them - caravan is?' It was about a quarter of a mile long, all the things that were needed to support

the cruise missile, and the guard things. 'It can be seen from outer space!' You know, the whole idea of cruise was you could take it out on the road, and the Russians would never see it. You could see it easily.

Yeah.

I never saw it come out. I didn't - most of what I saw come out and in, were workers who came in to service the base, and workers who went home. And often some of them would give us a thumbs up.

Really?

Yeah, sometimes they're looking at you as if you're costing them their job, but on the whole - and then there were the Americans - obvious Americans who'd brought their cars over - big cars that came out with the drivers, you know, steering wheel on the wrong side. And a lot of hoi polloi came in, and a lot of hoi polloi came out. And you were dragged away from everyone of them. Whenever anybody wanted to go in or out. You know.

Did you ever get arrested, Peggy?

Not then. I got arrested in front of a Westminster for objecting to cruise missiles. Forget what year that was. I made a song that I was gonna sing in court. It's a good song. It's a very good song. It's called Tomorrow.

Did you get to sing it, or did you not as far as..?

Got through one line, and I was sent down for contempt of court.

Oh.

I worked, I worked out my whole defence. And then the charge that would apply to that defence was dropped. Yeah. And I was charged with obstruction of something or other - obstruction of traffic. And then

I started to sing, and the same guy who took me down to the cells was the one who had arrested me.

Oh really?

Yeah.

What was he like?

He was a nice young man. You know, I didn't - nice young man. You know, one by one the police might be quite different from what they are like when they are with their buddies.

Yeah.

And maybe we're all different when we're in groups - who knows what all the Greenham women were like at home. But I think men take more to doing what the leader tells them to do than the women did. Certainly there were a lot of different - not factions - at Greenham common, but different types of women that were quite individual, we weren't an army, we weren't a monstrous brigade or whatever the term is.

Monstrous regiment.

Monstrous regiment.

Monstrous regiment of women.

Yeah. When women are really really, I mean, Ewan MacColl, one of his childhood memories, he was brought up in Salford, was a horrendous sound that he heard - of women screaming and shouting, and you could hear it, he says, from a long way away. They're coming and they're banging pots and pans. And apparently a little girl had been raped. And they thought they knew where the guy lived. And they were going to his house. And he said they marched past his, his, his house where he

lived, and he said it was terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. It was an entire ocean, as he put it, of women's absolute outrage, and the anger, yeah.

That's so amazing. That that's such a powerful sound. You can almost imagine it from what you're saying. And the, the Greenham women talk about music and sound, and song a lot as their memories - the things that come up a lot are woodsmoke and song.

I don't remember what they sang. For the most part, I don't remember them singing a lot.

Really? That's interesting.

No.

I think they did it to keep themselves amused at night. So maybe if you, if you didn't stay over as much, or maybe it's different gates, I don't know.

Well, I - we went at night when a lot of them were asleep. You probably had to stay there a lot to get that.

There's a songbook, a big PDF of a song book that you can download - it's just online. That has all of their - it's got like stuff they adapted, and it's all hand written, and it's...

How wonderful.

I'll e-mail it you. It is really cool.

Okay, would you remember to do that?

Yeah, I will.

Thank you. Other than that, um.

They sing another one of your songs in there - in the Carry Greenham Home film, they sing Reclaim the Night as well.

Yeah, that started to be, to be used on Me Too marches.

Yeah, yes. I bet.

And groups of women learn it. And they, god damn it, they sing it the whole way through.

It's disturbingly relevant still as well.

I know. I know. I know. Well, tying it down to the whole economic position of women. You know, it's, it's gradual rape a lot of the way women live.

Yeah.

And the condescension, you know - if an old man of my age was crossing the road, and, you know, was - sometimes I feel fragile crossing the roads. And another man came up and said 'Can I help you across the road, dear?', which they do with me.

Do they?

Yeah, and I nearly always accept. Because sometimes I'll take the arm of a stranger to cross a road, because I feel so fragile. And men just love it when you do that. (Laughs). But, er, and I've been known to even take the arm of a young man. 'Say, would you just walk me across?' The young men are nicer than the older men.

Really?

Mm hmm.

That's interesting.

They're helping their granny. Whereas the man is helping somebody who's probably like the wife he left. (Laughs). You never know.

Yeah. There's a question that we're asking, mostly, it's all quite self determined, because everyone's experience of Greenham is so different. But there's one question we're asking, that we're trying to get into every interview. So I'll just ask you it now if that's okay? Could you explain why you think it's important if you do, that Greenham is remembered by subsequent generations? Just thinking about the young and the old that you were talking about.

Women don't have a written history. You know. Look at what we learn in school. Women just don't - they don't figure. And they're fantastic women who've done unbelievable things, all through history. And they're, they always make them sound like one-offs. Um, and Greenham common was extremely unusual because it was er, women taking on the military establishment, and bringing to an end - because what we did bring it to an end - cruise missiles were sent home. We don't have them here anymore, to my knowledge. It's in a way like Brexit. Er, we were sold cruise missiles by Americans thinking that it was a way of avoiding surveillance from the Russians. And it was completely hopeless, the same way as Brexit is completely hopeless. And we were - the country was misinformed as to the usefulness of these things. Were misinformed as regards the usefulness of nuclear weapons, full stop. You know. So the power of a lot of women together, I think we have to celebrate it whenever it happens. Women do things differently. We are different from men no point trying to be equal. No, physically, we're, we're different. We are much more complicated creatures than men physically. Our bodies are unbelievably complicated compared to, compared to those of men. Extraordinary. Don't know if I have - see the book there that says 'Woman'?

Yep.

Get it.

Now? I was ready to jump up then - anything you say, Peggy!

No, no, you can. It runs through all of our systems that run our bodies, and it compares women's with men's. We are unbelievably complicated. We have better hearing, we can see colours better than men can. We have a delicacy in our hands that men do not have. We don't take ridiculous risks. We are more sharing, generally. There are men who share, there are men who see colour, there's men who hear well. But as a gender, women are - we had to be - we're sitting at the fire with the children, we are guardians of the children, anybody who's guarding the children has got to see - have 360 degree - you know. So that, it's an amazing book - goes through our brains, our digestive systems, our reproduction, the - just the way we operate as humans, as, as females. And the men are the rogues you know - the lion who comes in after the after the kill has been made by the females, and then chases the females away and eats it. That doesn't say that all men are - they're not. But they are not as a as a gender as subtle as women are, not as finely tuned. And they're not as patient, on the whole. They tend to go very, very quickly to aggression. Doesn't say I wasn't ready to kill my mother in law. But, you know that's, mm yeah.

Is there anything that you would like to have said, or you hoped I was going to ask that we haven't..?

I should have gone down to Greenham more than I did.

Do you think so?

But in the '80s I had a husband with heart problems, and a daughter who had asthma. Um.

Why do you feel you should have gone down more?

It was a great place to be, and you know, just turning up and, and doing something for 2 or 3 days, and then leaving. They did welcome you -

every time you turned up, you know - you got, you know, everybody was welcome. And it was from each according to what they could manage. And you just did whatever was necessary when you got there. And if you turned up with a car, it was fabulous because not all of them had, you know, and you could take somebody to the doctor if necessary, or you could go off to the grocery store, or take somebody to the court where they were supposed to be facing a whatever it was. But you just melded in the minute you got there, you just sat down, and if the fire needed feeding, you got up and fed it. Nobody said 'Your turn.' I don't remember any squabbles, where somebody said to somebody else 'You're not doing your bit.' It seemed to me that everybody did their bit. And there was no 'This is your job. And that's mine', the way there is with a marriage. Most marriages, whether they like it or not, when the cookie really crumbles and falls to the floor - watch who cleans it up. So, I think it would have done me a lot of good to be down there. Because you know, I was living in a house of sick people. My daughter and my husband. And I was taking care of them - not full time. We were still going out and touring, I had a career.

It's interesting that it's personal that you felt like you missed out by not being there enough.

Yeah.

I feel like that, that personal impact that Greenham seems to have had, was true for almost every woman we've interviewed - even though all the experiences are very different.

Yeah. And nobody said, oh, you're a well known singer, come sing us a song. No they didn't. If you felt like singing, you sang. But I don't remember singing a lot. I don't. And I didn't - I was not greeted as a singer, who they a lot of them already knew about, because I'd been writing women's songs since the mid '70s. But a lot of them came from a strata that knew bugger all about the area of music that I was in. What was the question again?

Oh, I think we've moved away from even being questioned at that point. I was think I was saying, my last thing I said to you is that women seem to be very personally affected by Greenham - it had changed them personally. And like for you saying you would personally have got more out of it. I suppose if there is a question in that, it's what do you think made Greenham so powerful? It impacted on women?

Yeah, it was noticing the way a lot of women worked together. Because I'd been in a heterosexual marriage for 25 years. And our friends were couples. And I didn't have a group of women friends, other than the Beckenham Anti-Nuclear Group, nuclear group, but we had two men in that. But most of my life was heterosexual. I wasn't part of a women's anything.

Did Greenham change that?

Ooh, yeah. Most of my friends now are older women. And I really like being in groups of women, I really do.

Me too.

And often, if you're in a group of women and a man turns up, it's just interesting to see how, you know, it's a drop of oil in the water. I mean, it's a stone that ripples out. Er, even if it's a man who's just trying like hell to fit in, you know? I mean, in my book I do write I don't think men can be feminists. I don't think it's possible. They can say what they like, but they can be feminist sympathisers, supporters.

Allies.

Allies. I like that. I like an ally. That's good. So I do know some smashing men. But it's a bit like, you know, in America, 'Some of my best friends are black.' You know?

'Some of my best friends are men' sort of thing? (Laughs). Only the best ones.

And there's a lot of men I really like, you know that I, that I know. A couple of them I really love. And I have two sons and I've got five grandsons.

Wow.

Yeah. And they're all what I would say, really, really good people, as far as I know. But going to Greenham really gave me my first taste of what women can do when we get together. The support we give to each other. And I know there are cases of women, you know, turning into little dictators in women's groups. But I don't remember that happening at Greenham. You know, Helen John was a very wise woman. She facilitated, and it was - she was a kind of - if anybody spoke for it, I think she did. She was there so long. And she was kind of like a wise woman. I don't remember Rebecca being - I don't remember her being that kind of wise woman. It could have been Rebecca who went over to the policeman and the motorcycle guy. Yeah. And she addressed the policeman first. That's important. And the policeman would have known it was important.

Yeah. Clever to understand the status of that situation, even if what you're doing is trying to change it.

Mm hm. She was brilliant. But I think that's all the memories that I have. I was there at the 30,000 - when the 30,000...

The Embrace the Base action, wasn't it?

Yeah, that's when I wrote *Woman on Wheels*. You've heard that one?

I haven't heard that one.

(Sings) 'I'm a woman on wheels, but I've still got my brain.' She was there. She was a Headmistress of a school in in Muswell Hill - Jennifer Jones. And she was cutting the... I'll send it to you.

Yeah, I'd love to hear that.

Yeah. Good song. It's a good song. She was in a wheelchair from the time she was 40. She was also an architect. Her husband left her when she got to - I think it was multiple sclerosis, or did she have..? And she designed her house for herself.

Wow.

Yeah, woman on wheels. And she mentions Greenham.

She sounds remarkable.

Yeah, she was. So I think that's all I can tell you at this point. I don't think there's anything else. Du-du-du-du-du-du-duh.

Have you got anything you'd like to add, Christine? It was absolutely wonderful to hear you talk about all that, Peggy.

Good.

(Christine) Is there one single abiding visual memory that you have?

Yeah. Yeah.

I guess it was one - there's several, but probably the one that is most telling for something like Greenham, was the guys bringing the blankets. Because there was, there weren't a lot of us. There weren't a lot of us at that little fire. Half a dozen. And these three cars come (makes fast noise), and they step out, and you don't feel good about that.

No.

Because we didn't have our complement of police at that fence. And I don't even think we had the guys marching with the - no that one didn't

have any - it might have had a soldier on the other side. But they were heavily armed, the soldiers on the other side.

What was it about those three cars, and the way these guys were with you, and the way you were as women in that situation that is quintessential?

The darkness. Because all there was was our fire.

And they couldn't have it? And it made them angry?

Well, well, they obviously had come to trade blankets for sitting at the fire. And who knows - maybe picking up one of us?

Yeah.

I don't know, men are strange. You know, that little thing that hangs between their legs urges them on to do a lot of things. And I think that is a lot of it. You know, when you look into the physiology, men produce buckets of sperm every day. They gotta do something with it. It's there - it's very, one of the most telling comments a man has ever made to me, was in Sacramento. And I had just given a concert. I had a song called 'Everyone Knows'. And it's about hormones, women's hormones, and men's hormones. It's a slightly funny song. And he came up to me, a little guy with a beard. He said 'You know, I love being old.' He says, 'That's not telling me what to do.' And he went, (makes fast sound) like that.

Pointing at his groin, sort of thing?

Yeah. That's not telling me what to do. It's not leading me around. But - not that the women were predictable, but I don't think there was much violence at Greenham. I didn't ever see any. But man against man, there seems to be an awful lot of violence. Something that just has to be. But err, you did see this - that night, and it didn't feel good. There

was one quite strong woman she says 'We don't trade blankets for a place at the fire, but thank you for the blankets.'

It's a really brilliant, brave thing to do that, I think. Because we're so socialised not to ever do that. The things that we will put up with so as not to be rude could fill a library, not just a book. And she really broke out of that - I feel like Greenham really allowed - should prove by example, that you can not be polite, but also not be aggressive, and it not kill you.

I think in a way, I probably learned a lot from Greenham about diplomacy.

Really? Yeah, I can imagine that.

Um-hum. Because I have tended to be rather a control freak in my time, probably still am. But seeing the other person's point of view, um, I think that helped. Because I don't think there was ever any direct aggression against any of the people that came down. I don't remember it.

Very different to the media image that was painted of the Greenham women, isn't it that?

I know, yeah.

I feel like there was - when you talk about the fences they kept putting up, the amount of guards, the way the media was so virulently against them. It feels like there was this real sense of, of that Greenham threatened society in some way?

Hmm. I know, certainly did.

Threatened the establishment.

We certainly well, we did threaten the establishment, but in our own way - it wasn't the word threaten. I think probably we turned some spotlights on what was happening. The real thing of what's happening.

Tell the truth.

Shall we have some food?

Yeah. Thank you so much, Peggy. That's been fascinating.