

Penny Gulliver

So, um, can I ask you when you went to Greenham? How old you were? And how did it come about? How did that happen?

I was 21, um and I was living in London. I was involved in community theatre - issue based, political theatre, and I went, it would have been October 1983, and I was there for a year. For a year, basically. And I went because, I was already a political person, and a kind of, on a very - a fairly straight forward, socialist trade union kind of family background, and stuff - from the south, from Southampton. And er, and I thought, and I was anti-nuclear, very anti-arms trade - all those kinds of things, and for me I didn't think I was going to go and live there forever, but I did feel like I have to go and do a shift. And my shift was a year - but I had to leave in the end because I got sick. Um, but er that's why I went. I went this is a point where I've got - I haven't got a job, I was applying for community theatre jobs and not getting them. So I went with somebody else in the same - also involved in community theatre. And so we went. The year previous, I can't remember now the dates - the er, the hands around the base thing had happened for the first time the year before - I can't remember the dates, or maybe it hadn't? I can't remember at all, but we were there for two of those, so I think it might have been the year before, or it might have been the year after - sorry. Um, and so and we stayed. Basically we went down for three nights, and it was really cold, but on the third night I warmed up and went 'yeah, I can do this'. So we went back to London, packed a proper bag and we went back the following day, and I lived there for a year.

And when you went for those three nights, did you take a tent or did you take a bender?

No, I took a tent. We took a tent and we left it there, because it was a scrappy old tent that we literally machined together. Like, you know - I can't believe - it didn't have a fly sheet, so we added a bit of plastic into a fly sheet that we found it was too small. And the three of us slept in there and it was absolutely freezing. And so we left it there, and when we went back obviously somebody else was sleeping in it, and then we built a bender. So, um continued to build benders all year, particularly after, because in the March of that year was when they started to come and clear the camps everyday, and they cleared Blue Gate - I was at Blue Gate. They cleared Blue Gate everyday, and so you were literally, um building a bender everyday to sleep in, unless it was warm enough to sleep out. I got quite good at it.

How come you chose Blue Gate? Or did Blue Gate choose you?

Blue Gate chose us. It was a complete accident. It was dark when we got there - we got off the bus, we walked up the hill, um, because it was October and it wasn't late, but we'd gone and it was completely dark, and we didn't really know where we were going. We walked up the hill, and we could see something, which of course was a fire, and Blue Gate was the first gate that you come to if you walk out the town of Newbury, and so we stopped there. And at that time it was called the Inter City Punk Gate, and it was, and the woman I went with was from Bradford, and everybody was really from the north of the county, or they were Irish, Scottish or Welsh. And there was one other southerner there at the time, and then there was two of us, really. And that was, and we kind of - we went and it was very working class, and very quickly you kind of understood - I think at that point there was four gates, or maybe - yeah it was probably only four - Yellow, Green, Orange and Blue. And then because over that winter and the spring, you know all the others popped up - Red, Turquoise, blah blah blah. Yeah, so we stayed - it was a bit like it was a good fit, but it was an accident.

Can you remember each of the gates having a particular character?

Yes.

Can you tell me what they all were?

Yes. Orange Gate was definitely older at that time, or it felt older - to us - they were probably in their 30s. But there were lots of women there who'd been part of the Aldermaston marches and stuff, and it was lovely. They had settees at Orange Gate! They always had better cake! Which I don't know how they did it, but they did. And they were very lovely. Green Gate was much more international - there was lots of women from all around the world. It was much more hippy, skippy, kind of lots of jumping over the flames and wishing out the evil - all that kind of thing, which I loved, but which wasn't us. And I met a lot of people that I really liked - from other places in the world. And Blue Gate - some of the gates you had male visitors in the day - although it was obviously women only. Green Gate was women only all of the time - because it was really hidden and in the woods and stuff. And then there was Yellow Gate of-course, which most of the women at Yellow Gate referred to as Main Gate. And there were a lot of kind of nice women, there were a lot of women with children which was lovely, but there were also quite a small, fairly middle class group of white women who would come to Blue Gate and say things like 'don't speak to the press, you're showing us up', 'don't go to the pub, you're showing us up' - there was a lot of that kind of thing. 'You shouldn't be taking state money' - because we were signing on, and we were all a bit like 'what the fuck do you live on?'. And then of-course we found out they were all being sponsored by Japanese Peace Groups, and stuff like that, and it was like 'great then - great for you'. So yeah, so there were clashes that year around class. (Laughs). And then other gates popped up, so some of the Green

Gate women went off and set up Violet - one along, including my friend Katrina, which was lovely and there were lots of kids at those, because they were on the other side of the fence, so there were very nice people - women, who set up there, and Turquoise set up just along from us, which were basically a vegan gate. Because most gates were vegetarian, everybody was vegetarian, but you didn't take - even if you were a meat eater, and there were meat eaters at our gate, but they went into town and had - you know chicken sandwiches and stuff - but that was a vegan gate. Then there was Emerald Watch, which was basically - it was a Japanese woman, whose name I can't remember, who was lovely, who set up what was Cruise Watch, because when cruise came in on the 14th November of that year - '83, it was - they set up literally on the other side of the fence from there. So they ended up kind of nine or so gates in that year. You know, some with more than others, but they definitely had character.

How much do you think that the, those kind of tensions of class and race and sexuality and any kind of difference of politics, or veganism or whatever, how much do you think they were managed in day to day interaction? How much do you think they became problems?

You see I think it's probably, again, probably very different to who lived at what gates, and because we were definitely a very working class gate, we were very white. There was only one black woman who lived for any length of time at Blue Gate when I was there - one called Julie, who died, um, in her late 20s, so a long time ago now. And almost, a big chunk of us were lesbians, um - not everybody. Everyone respected the fact it was vegetarian, but there were some vegan women who went off to set up Turquoise, um, at that time. But it wasn't - it wasn't - lots of those things weren't a big issue. We talked politics all of the time - non, and we had - because we were Blue Gate, and because we were the first ones that a lot, I mean a lot of us obviously went to Yellow, but a lot would come to Blue because it was the first place that they ran into - like we did. So we had hundreds of visitors. And I have to say we talked politics to everybody who came, about everything - about the women who came and did night duties, because we, because we were getting ransacked by the police - because at that point Thames Valley were on the outside of the fence. Um, that we started to have night watches every night - even before cruise came, um, so that's all you talked about. And um, but there were - the issues that we had - we spent quite a time arguing to have camp meetings, circulate the base, and that happened in that year, but man that was a struggle to get Yellow Base to move. And also that we, there was a treasurer who held the money for camp, and we got that to circulate, and that was a real scrabble. And those were the times when I remember there being issues. I don't actually remember, I remember there'd be women who'd fall out with each other - usually around sex, around sleeping with other women and all that kind of thing - that was the arguments that I remember. But the others I remember -

having a big meeting at Blue Gate the first time, and having terrible, um having a very big row, and it must have been the spring or something of '84, um, and it was about class. And um, I think people were shocked. I can understand why lots of black women came and went, 'this is not for us' - it was very white. It was a very, you know, and none of the other camps were very different on that level. And there were black women there. I, sometimes, when people talk about it being very middle class I want to say 'actually there was a lot of working class women there', and they're just kind of - again them coming round and saying 'this is going to happen, but don't you talk to the press, we'll talk to the press because we'll be so much more articulate than you' - that kind of shit. So, um, so, what I remember is there being some issues about class, but not within our gate. Actually usually, and the fact is there were lots of middle class women at Green Gate who we didn't row with in the same way, because they were not hanging on to that power in the same way as some of those women at Yellow were. But that makes - in lots of ways - that makes it sound like much more of a big issue, than on a day to day basis than it was - it wasn't. Do you know what I mean? And there was the same kind of structural power issues that you faced in your everyday life back home - it just happened to be all women, but men would turn up, and you'd say 'it's okay, come over to the fire, where have you come from' whatever, at Blue Gate, and then he'd go 'you know what you're doing wrong', and you'd go 'for fuck's sake!' It would happen all of the time, 'you're a bit untidy' - 'well that's because the police have been through and wrecked everything' - do you know what I mean? 'And sometimes that's that's not the priority - tidying up. I know you think that's what women should be doing, but it's not a priority.' Do you know what I mean - it was that kind of - there would be a lot of that.

It's like that's why! You're the reason why we're doing it like this!

Yes. 'It would be much more successful...' I said 'yeah, that's why all the mixed camps are all falling apart because of sexual, you know, sexual violence and all the rest of it. It might not be from other camp people, but who - that thing about who's a good man, who's a bad man, that kind of thing'. And obviously a lot of stuff around sexual politics was talked about and you know, we were predominately lesbian - but it wasn't at Blue Gate at that time, but it wasn't a big deal.

But years later with the infiltration by under-cover policemen?

Yes. And that was - and at the time when we were there we had a couple of things with the press. We had somebody from the Sun come in her mini, and put it in a ditch at Blue Gate. We went over - not only did we get her out, and carry her practically to the fire, and sit her down, give her a cup of tea, see if she was alright, we got the mini out of the ditch - because there was no way else it was going to get out. And the next week in the Sun 'molested by lesbians at Blue Gate - their hands were all over me,

blah blah blah', and we were all like 'we just...the woman had crashed her car'. So there was lots of that - there was the Scottish woman whose name I can't remember - Lynn, who basically came from a small village, and some Scottish paper went home, and pictures of her all over - wasn't allowed basically back into the village, never mind her own home. There was a lot of those kinds of things. There was a lot of expose stuff, and we did get a bit paranoid about the police when - because we did run actions weekly - we went on an action at-least once a week, if not more, and we did during that whole year, and um and we did all get a bit paranoid sometimes - especially after the press and people would say 'oh there's police as well, there's police spies', and you'd get arrested and taken in, and they would say 'we know this, and we know that', and you'd go 'how do they know that, how do they know that?' And obviously it was, because there were police amongst us.

When - that talking about politics was, I know that you're saying this wasn't big problems between the women, but that talking about politics was not abstract, was it?

No.

You were talking about things in the world.

Yes.

In this place.

Yes, and there were people who came who came from a party political background - but few, very few. In one of those ways I was one of those people - my mother volunteered with the Labour Party for like 75 years or something, and I'm one of those people that she would say 'just join the party, just do stuff'. And I would join the party, and then I would leave over something, and she'd go 'nobody cares, that you're leaving!' And I'd go 'I'm not giving them my money - they're doing terrible things', you know - several times - serial monogamy with the Labour Party. And my politics are to the left of the Labour Party, but she would say 'this is where working class people are, and how are we going to change things? You're not going to change things'. And so, we were few actually - most women came from all sorts of different reasons, but their politics was very much definitely based in the reality of their lives - not about 'I've read this at college, and I've decided to be a Marxist', so yes.

I mean for me it's definitely - I learnt a lot of other things there, so it was - I went for anti-nuclear, I came away with a lot of other knowledge.

And I think that's - for me - that's one of the most important things that came out of camp. I think the vast majority of women went to camp - whether you lived there, you

stayed overnight, you visited, people came because they were anti-nuclear, and it was clear cut. And women said that so many times. 'I came because I was against the bomb' - a lot of older women would say 'I don't agree with the bomb', or 'I'm anti-nuclear - I didn't know about all this other stuff'. and you literally could see those things being put together - because women would - there were lots of women from Ireland and they would say 'this is what happens in Derry', and they would go 'oh god, if they're telling lies about this, they're probably telling lies about you, and they're probably telling lies about those people, and those people, and this place.' And you literally saw people string all those things together, and I think - so I think that was the most common experience for me. It wasn't my experience, I went with a kind of fairly, er, you know - set of politics which had grown over years, but my politics did change at camp. I went thinking there was important things, and that was about class, it was about women, and about violence and war and all of those sorts of things. And environmental and green stuff was definitely lower down the list, and when I went there I suddenly did that kind of, you know, I think I might have made this up but it was where someone would say - when you talk about domestic violence or whatever - in that situation, and somebody would say 'you know when a company cuts down the trees on a hill in Bangladesh, you know, er, half a million women will drown in the villages below - so why are their lives less important than the women you're talking about?' And of-course they're not, but actually what you need to talk about is the English mining and logging company that are cutting down the trees, and it looks - this is an environmental disaster, but actually it's the death of people as well, so I think I suddenly - I did that kind of - you can't - it doesn't matter how you come to politics - what issues you work on, or how you string it together - it's the fact that you're involved and you do those things, and environmental politics and other things like that, are as important as the other things you come with. And you can't prioritise - it's pointless to try.

There's a lot of talk nowadays about intersectional feminism,

Yes.

..and um again it seems to me that the actual make up of 'well these women were all middle class, and these women were all white, and'...doesn't reflect the variety of things that were being considered and talked about, and so it seems to me that it's almost like, um there's a kind of reductionism of 'well if this person was here, they only talked about those things'?

Yeah, and that actually wasn't my experience at camp, and we didn't have that word then. But one of the things we talked about at the time, and people would get - and we fell into the trap of doing it as well, because there was a lot of class politics that we talked about. But for me class is slightly different to some of the other things,

class is one of the things I want to get rid of - I don't want to get rid of some of the other diversities that we, you know, that we think about and that, was that - er, let me just think before I waffle endlessly about this! We talked about it, but we got into a place where one of the things we got sick about in the '80s was there was a lot of fighting other - not fighting, arguing - about who's the most oppressed. And so we wanted to not do that, but then we fell into that going -because I remember at one of these meetings we'd said there's five or six middle class women who'd hogged the conversation about what we should do, and how we should bring attention back to what was going on - and there was a hundred people sitting around - and I remember being the person who said it really inarticulately going 'you have to stop talking, because there's a hundred people around here that haven't said anything, and we need to listen to other people'. And I remember this woman looking at me going 'I've become big and strong by practicing - don't tell me to shut up'. I went really red. And she went 'okay, we'll have 10 minutes, and then we'll go around the circle', and of-course people started to laugh, and it 'was like why are you laughing?' And it was like 'so you've talked for an hour, and now the other 95 people here are going to get 10 minutes between us?' And then the ice-cream van arrived and they went 'ice cream!' And they all ran off, and we all went home. So it was a bit like - so it was that kind of, you know, we said there are people who have a worse time than us, and they're not here - generally, because if you're very poor, you're very controlled, if, you know, very often that would be, you know obviously working class women, black women, women with disabilities were not at camp in great numbers because of obviously - because of the reality of their lives, and that not being the case. There were a lot of young people out of care, and run aways that used to arrive. And lots of women with mental health problems, and lots of women running away from domestic abuse, you know - who found a safe place there. Do you understand that - it was a bit like it was trying not to get into who is the most oppressed, but also, and recognising those things, but also saying 'actually shut up!' You know - 'other people need to speak'.

I mean I think what happened afterwards became quite well funded by people like the GLC, funding, er, different identity politics, which in man says, er, was a divide and rule...

Yes, yes.

...so it's kind of - it's a balance isn't it?

It is.

How to recognise difference without having it used against you in that way.

Absolutely, and somebody said - I can't remember who it was - somebody said some marvelous expression of the '80s, and I can't remember who said it - but it was like we were so busy fighting amongst ourselves, about how to cut things up, and who was most oppressed, that they actually sold the whole fucking lot off behind our backs, and we turned around and the world was gone. And that was really true. And the left is always like that - we're always easily - when we're not doing it ourselves - picked upon from the outside about divide and rule - just as we're witnessing now with what's going on in the left - but that has never been different, it's a bit like you know - it's just ongoing.

But for a long time it seemed to me that Greenham was somewhere those differences were being explored, but not used against us.

Absolutely.

Do you think that the notion, that women actually organising together and just simply doing things together - like socialising together was more normal, let's say - then, than it is now?

Yes. It doesn't happen in my life now. I got to a women's forum that's local, and very few women go to it. But then it was normal, and I felt like, people say 'oh it was so extreme in the '80s and stuff', but lots of change - I feel, you have to start out there, because the compromise brings you in from where you are, and unless you stand out there and go 'this is wrong - we have to change things', and take a lot of shit for it, it doesn't even get onto the agenda of change, and that was what was marvelous about Greenham was that you could sustain that for such a long period of time - and talk about all sorts of things. And you know one of the things that we did over the Easter of '84 - the press did a 'we've evicted everybody - everybody's gone', and the press silence and we decided on the Easter weekend to start being arrested, and everyone would keep - because they would just keep - they would arrest some, keep some in, chuck some out - you would just keep getting arrested until they were filling up all the local jails as far as whatever, and we would alert the press to say 'look, we are still here, and this is still going on, and the cruise missiles are still here, and are still trundling around the countryside when they feel like it'. And all these things were organised - it was consensus. All the meetings, we didn't have voting - you talked until you agreed, and we did things all the time, on a daily basis. People seem to think that that's impossible, and actually it's not. And you might not get what you want today, but you might next Tuesday, when you talk about something else, and it's a bit like, and people work, and it was like generally, when I think about camp it was - god it was a fabulous thing, and a fabulous time, and we had such a lovely time. And we talked about such serious things, things that broke your heart that people would tell you about, and you felt like you were doing stuff, and that you would go on doing

stuff, and yet would change your life, and it would change other people's lives but it was wonderful - it wasn't terrible - it was wonderful. And I can't think of any other time in my life when I've worked in mixed groups when they've been nice people, and I've liked the men that I worked with, and we've done good things - but it wasn't like camp, it just wasn't.

And the percentage of time that was having a blow up about something or other, compared to the percentage of time that made something happen...

Absolutely - it was tiny - the blow up times, and I think it's because obviously you want to unpick those times, you want to go 'what went wrong, what could you do different?', but actually they were tiny in comparison to the good things and the disastrous things. The fact that, when I think about it now, we were running actions from Blue Gate, on at-least a weekly basis - sometimes people would be doing things every night of the week until everybody ended up in prison, and I think there was only four of us - in the January or something - when you were doing two on, two off - you know, just to stay up overnight because cruise came out of Blue Gate, so it was like, god, shattering. But shattering in a, you know, you're young and you can do that then. You were alive, and it was wonderful.

Was there a sense that this was the right place to be?

Yes, yes. And was difficult because you were just slammed in the press all of the time. Hideous stuff in the press constantly. You were getting, there were blokes in drive-bys at Blue Gate all the time - people got beaten up all the time, you know - some people got beaten up when they were arrested. Things were thrown at you - I remember a farmer coming by and just shooing pig shit over everybody. Biscuit tins of blood - that kind of thing. So there was endless those things. But it was a bit like, well it was just like, you know, you had a make-do wash under a bucket somewhere, and you carried on. And it was like this is the place - no going home. I went home because I got dysentery - not from camp. But now I look back, and I think I probably didn't have dysentery - I was ill, and I saw a doctor, and then the environmental health turned up and said I'd given a positive dysentery test and that I would have to leave and blah blah. And that's what happened, and then I left then - I went back for court, but I went back to London. We were squatting in South London, and I had to give a sample to environmental health for 6 months, and I never gave another positive sample. So now I look back and go 'it wasn't true'. And that was all over the press, because everybody knew my name - up until that point nobody knew my name, and suddenly all those women at Yellow Gate knew who I was! (Laughs). 'Here's a knife and fork, and go over there, and don't touch anything' - that kind of thing when you're in court. We were talking about those things, it's a bit like the place to be. And you were frightened - you were going to be doing stuff, and you would break in or

whatever you were doing, or painting the runways, or whatever it was we were quite often on diversion - someone would come from Yellow and say 'we want to take pictures of something, so you need to cause a diversion over here, Blue Gate'. So we'd be 'oh great', and we'd all rustle out, and you'd all pee - because we'd all have to pee before you went, and then you'd go and you'd break in, and you'd all get arrested, and you'd be sitting somewhere, and you'd go 'oh, what's going to happen tonight', and then you'd find out they'd had a row at Yellow Gate about who was going to take the pictures and then they called it off, but nobody come and told Blue Gate! You know those kind of things would happen all the time - because it was like four and a half miles to walk around and tell you, because there was no car, so they didn't bother. So we'd all be sitting there going, 'oh it's going to be hundreds of people here, and this'll be all over the press', and of-course nothing happened at all, you know. But when I think about now, I think this would have been cut down, and we'd have put carpet over, and you would have run - you and you would have run that way, so the soldiers would chase you, and the next lot could go over the barbed wire, and then you, you and you would do that and they'd have the paint, and they would run to smash out the lights - this was before um, cruise came in and stuff - there was lots of trying to paint out the lights on the runway so that they couldn't land, and so and I was thinking, golly - it was fantastic, it was like those games you play - the games I played when I was a kid where you're always things like, you were resistance fighters in the war and you did all that kind of thing, you know - crawling along the ground, and through puddles and stuff. You were doing that, but you were doing it for something that was really worthwhile and wonderful, but still scary - but wonderful.

And you were 'Terrified Mary' by the end of all of this?

God it was awful, people who'd never - they'd come up and go 'you should be over there' - because I was only went back for one night because I was in court the following day, and suddenly everybody knew who I was, and it was a bit like god! Little neon sign around my neck.

Were you ready to leave, anyway?

Maybe I was. There were people who stayed a very long time, and I think a year - had that not happened I don't think I'd have stayed much longer. I think lots of people were going off to do different things who had been there that year, and it was - there was a rolling kind of new people coming and going. And in lots of ways I liked the winter more than the summer. The summer - it was nice because you weren't wet and cold and stuff, but there was a lot of things to do in the winter, and I quite like building, these things that you discovered - that I liked digging, and you know we built an outdoor shower I remember, one day. It was basically cold water and a bucket, and we all took our clothes off and had a shower outdoors - and it was February, but it

was - there was just ridiculous things like that, and it was like wow, who'd have thought we could rig this up, you know.

I think there's a big important thing about whatever was happening - whether it was building a shower, falling out with, being a bit of an arse, being magnificent - it was all women, doing all of those things.

Yes.

And do you think that had an impact - how old were you at the time?

I was 21 to 22, I was.

Do you think that has an impact to, on young women - to experience that so young?

Yes I do, and I think what one of the important things that came out of all that for women that went, and for me, and certainly for women I knew, it makes you brave in a way that you don't experience in your life. You spend all your life being told 'you're not brave, you're not strong', do you know what I mean, and very much I grew up in the '60s and '70s, and I was a lesbian and you start to stand outside - I knew I was a lesbian at secondary school - you start to stand on the outside of that stuff and look at it - well some people do, and I know a lot of other women, no doubt, internalise that kind of homophobia and stuff, and stereotypical stuff about women - but you kind of start to think 'well I don't agree with those kinds of things' - but you're subjected to all of that all of the time. And it is about, and definitely it was about being weak, and dependent on men, and only men being able to do certain things and whatever, and suddenly you go 'actually, you can look at all the roles women have, and they are the strong roles - the roles that hold up communities and hold up families, hold up each other, that they make things work, they stick things together, they are the strong-men of the world - from the circus, but they are women'. And I think you went to camp, and it was a bit like you just couldn't get away from it - all day everyday, it didn't matter what needed doing, you did it, and you had a good time. And some things were stupidly easy - that were things that you'd been made to feel women could never do, you know, and even through visitors - like the men who would turn up and tell you they thought you should tidy up, because it looked bad when people drove by - those kinds of things, and it was like oh man! Or 'you'd be better off...this is the sort of strategy you should use', and anyway. So yeah, it made you brave - and you were frightened, you were going to break in, and you don't know what's going to happen, and the first time as well, you don't know what it's going to look like to be arrested. I'd not been arrested - I'd been on demonstrations where now you would say you'd been kettled. I remember going on anti Robert Ralph - the racist who went to Winchester Prison - he was the man who put the sign up saying 'I only want to sell my house to a

white family', but he'd also been done for lots and lots of assaults - this wasn't his first crime. And I'd taken part in there were big National Front things, and I'd turn out with all these Hippies - when I was at school, it was really great, and they would kettle you - so I'd had some skirmishes with the police, but this was the first time I'd been arrested. And all that, and then going into court all the time, and things which are scary, but as soon as you're done them the first couple of times, they're not scary. You still have - people got beaten up or people got locked up by themselves, and I'm a bit claustrophobic, so I found that quite difficult to be put in a prison, but actually it makes you brave. And you think this is how you change the world - you change the world by with other people, and in this case you change the world with other women - this is how it's done. It's not done through the funny old channels that we done, or writing petitions or whatever.

Was there also a sense of 'I knew this was possible'?

Yes, I think so - because I was excited to go, and you have that trepidation of 'what if it's awful?', do you know what I mean? But as soon as you got there, and there's a fire, and it's one of the things I only think about now about being outside - there was a fire, and you ate vegetable mush everyday, or baked beans and mashed potato - I think that's all I ate for a year, and you sang all the songs that you knew, and then you went to bed or whatever, because you kind of ran out of things to do, and then you got up and started building things. But it as exciting, and you met people, and you heard all sorts of stories, and there were people who were really funny and that you loved, and there women that you didn't like very much, and there were women that I didn't like very much, but it didn't kind of matter in the grand scheme of things, you just got on with things, and it was fine - do you know what I mean, and it was, it was wonderful.

....

Day to day it was like which part of the year, I'll say again so October, November, December of '83 there were many, many visitors, so you talk to visitors all day everyday. It was just constant, and great, and there were lots of practical tasks. The police were there at first - Thames Valley, they were awful - they were really disruptive and they would destroy things and wreck things, so we started a night duty, where you would sit up all night. So there was an awful lot of putting things back together again all the time, but there were also things like making sure there was food - people would cook, people would wash up. You had to gather fire wood everyday, because of-course that was the only way to a) cook things, and stay warm, and fill your hot water bottles at night if you were cold, which lots of the Australians did - who were always cold at Green Gate. So it was busy, but there were lots of us. Then come January lots of people went to prison at the same time from Blue Gate,

and we went down to four and five of us, and that was quite hard, so you'd have to have two people on at night and so you would be sleeping in day, and then on at night - almost like a night on, a night off - and doing all those other jobs. So that was, it was really busy, but it was good. As well as all the other things - you were still doing actions, and um I, so there was a woman - Kirstin, from Manchester, but I think she lived in Bradford, and she was a wonderful writer, and we had a book that on night duty you would write in, because there's just not very much to do - as you can imagine, and the nights were long in the winter, and it was wonderful - it was a novel, it was fabulous writing, and it was funny and interesting and insightful, and it was a piece of history in itself. And we'd write all the songs - we wrote all of the songs that we'd sing, and I can't sing, but wrote a lot of songs, and they were all written in the Blue Book, and it was very precious. And then our time at the start of the year - in the March they decided to evict everybody, and they evicted Blue Gate everyday, and the police would come and out out your fire - with an extinguisher they'd put out the fire. So you had to be quick enough to get a shovel, put it in the fire and run away with something hot on the shovel when they put it out. So when they'd gone, you could come back and you could start with hot coals basically, and so you weren't losing - because sometimes it would be difficult to restart. They'd come and evict you, and they'd take everything - all your benders, all your possessions: your boots, your sleeping bags, everything - if you weren't quick enough - the food, your pans, everything, and so you had to be quick. And also because cruise came out of Blue Gate, you knew of-course you were never quick enough - lots of times - you'd go 'oh my god there's loads of police arriving', and it'd be like three in the morning, and you'd go 'they must be bringing it out', and someone would have to run or cycle to the nearest phone box on the estate to set off the telephone tree - but invariably someone would get to the box and the phone wasn't working, because they used to cut the phone lines at the same time as cruise came out. And there would be like hundreds of police that would surround you, and cruise would come out of Blue Gate, so there were, that was always in your mind that you couldn't just skip it and go to sleep, because it was where it was coming out of, and you can imagine they would have gone mad if we'd let it come out without telling anybody. Um, and so then there were evictions, so that was kind of council workers would come, and the police would come, and everything would be chucked in, and then it was people running off into the woods and trying to scoop things up, so you're kind of, you try and pack things a bit in the morning to make sure you don't lose it. But the first morning of the eviction, which I think was the 5th March or something, me and another woman who lives her - Annie - we'd come up for a court case the following morning, for things that we'd done earlier on, and on the way up someone had given us a ride and said 'let's do some painting on the way up', so we stopped at all the army recruitment bases, all the way from London, and painted, and we painted some bridges on the M4 saying about peace - things like that. And we got to camp and said 'is there some white spirit or some turps?' And they went 'oh no, we've run out', and we were

covered in paint. So we crawled into a bender and slept, and we slept between two fuzzy blankets - a yellow fuzzy blanket and a pink fuzzy blanket that when we got up in the morning had stuck to all the paint all over us, our skin, our clothes, everything. So we went off to court looking like that we were doing some kind of action in the court, but actually we had nothing to get it off and stuff. But the worst thing about it was, they held us that night - because they couldn't send us to prison - we got three weeks or something, and they couldn't send us for some reason, because they started the evictions that day, so we were in, and everyone was coming in, and there was one - Penny Thornton from Bradford, she tipped blue paint all over herself when they came, and was smearing it all over the windscreens, and of-course they brought her, and she was just like blue from head to foot! And we were like 'oh, you're blue, and I'm yellow, and she's pink!' Anyway, and they all came in, and then they shipped us off, and as we were going along the M4 I just always remember being in the van - and it was an ordinary van, which was odd because they used to put you in the horrible, you know the butchers' wagon things, where you were in the - you know, and I'm really claustrophobic. But we were sat in an ordinary minibus with the police, and they kept going 'that's one of your lot', and it was us! And we were laughing, because there was all this yellow and pink paint on everything, and we were smothered in yellow and pink paint, and nobody went 'hey' - they obviously weren't detectives - 'it's the same colour as you!' Anyway then of-course we went to Holloway, and I can't tell you how much we scrubbed with the whatever to get the crap off, but you know - it came off eventually. So then life looked different, and there was a press silence then, they were saying you were evicted, but the evictions carried on everyday, nobody went away, but there was a press silence like 'oh, Greenham's ended', so over the Easter we did a kind of - yeah, and I can't remember, there was probably about 90 women involved, and you just kept going in and one, and Julie - who I talked about before - she was last woman standing, and she broke in something like nine times before they eventually kept her - but that's how long it took. I think I broke in three times before I was shipped out to Windsor nick, which was new. And we filled out all the police stations around in a spiral out from Newbury, and we told all the press - the only press that came was the Guardian, and they took pictures and run it, and it was really funny because when we went all to court for it, we all got charged for it. Annie who lives here was on the front page of the Observer with bolt cutters, and they offered no evidence against her, and she was the only person who didn't get actually found guilty on that occasion, and it was really funny, because we were like 'she was on the front page of a national newspaper on the Sunday', and there was a wonderful picture of her, which they run again at the millennium and they looked at things that had happened, and one of the pictures they ran was the picture of her cutting through the wire on that action, but it was great, because it was a bit like they were 'oh, we don't know who this person is, and she got off'.

So this was a tactic to say there is no - Greenham is finished, it's over, and the counter response from the camp was for every woman to get arrested?

Yes, yeah. And to keep going, and there were women who came down - visitors and stuff, who looked after the camp, so that everybody who lived there regular, who could, took part in that action. And it was quite funny, we all went off into the woods for the night before and just had a really nice time - who was going to go where, and what, and you know what the structure of the weekend would look like and stuff, and then we went back and did it all in broad daylight and they were all a bit 'oh, this is all a bit odd', because on Good Friday they couldn't send you straight down because the magistrates wouldn't sit again until the Tuesday, so we would have to go into the police stations and fill them up. That was the idea - rather than them just picking you up and sending you off in little groups to prison they would - we would have to fill up the jails, so that was why we did it over the Easter weekend, because that was the maximum amount of time they would have to hold us, and stuff. And so yeah, but it was all quite funny, but I remember then the army brought dogs - which is quite scary - cutting in in daylight, and they were all revving the dogs up, so they were all really kind of crazy on the inside, and people got quite hurt, and got bitten and stuff during that, but I remember getting through and these two soldiers looked at me and did the 'what's the best way to carry you, then?' And I went 'I don't know, I'm going to just lie down now' - because that's what you did, you just lay down, but I said I'll tell you what - 'you can put your arms under my knees and around the back, and then you can pick me up and put me in the back', and they went 'okay'. And that is what they did - they picked me up like in a little chair and put me in the back of the wagon, and there were literally - I was looking going 'I feel really bad', because I can see Annie from Green Gate being dragged by her beautiful long blonde hair through the mud by some arse with a dog, and there I am with these two soldiers going, and I wanted to do 'I think you're in the wrong business, I really think you should go and, maybe you should be Quakers - you're not cut out for this, boys'.

What was the range of different kinds of reactions and relationships you had with the army?

Most of the time it was nothing at all. There were some who would stand at the gate and just shout abuse and stuff. Most of the time they looked very bored. Some of them when you broke in were quite horrible. Some would stand at the fence and go 'oh, I don't agree with this nuclear stuff you know - there's stuff going on now you know, there's lots of fuss going on, I think something's happening. And they would tell you things. Or sometimes you would walk around - because they all had their guns - and they would walk and they would just shout abuse at you, and you'd be walking along the fence and they'd just be shouting at you. But not all of them. Some of them were certainly anti-nuclear. Some of them were obviously 'well I don't

really want to be in the army, but it was a bit like I didn't have anything else, so don't be horrible to me' - that kind of thing. When you, and I think on the whole the police were much more unpleasant, and sometimes when you got held inside, they would take you to wherever it was, and they would hold you, and some of the holding staff were very unpleasant, and it felt like they got these jobs because they were like - you know. But some of them they were just, 'I don't know why we're here, and I don't know what's going on, and I don't like the Americans being here', and would speak their anti-American - because we would change all the signs to say USAF - United States Air Force, rather than what was on them because it wasn't MoD stuff - it was the Americans, and the Americans did what they want as well. But it was also really badly - at some level it was really easy to break in. Women broke into the control tower, and nobody come to arrest them until they flicked the lights on and off twenty times, do you know what I mean, and used all the phones, and go 'okay stand down everybody, everybody go home - there's a picnic on runway one' all this kind of thing, and it was ages...and it was a bit like if foreign powers wanted to come it would be so easy! This is a nonsense that this is safe at any level, and then you trundle around the countryside with enough weaponry to blow the planet up seven times, and think that that's what, useful? Safe? Nobody needs to bomb us, we're going to bomb ourselves when someone, you know, runs it into a tree at the end of the street because they drive too fast, and these machines are too big to turn the corners properly.

Of the little wind-y roads of Berkshire!

Oh my god, yeah. So a very mixed bunch, and a lot of them they just ignored you, but the whole spectrum.

What about how that process where you learnt how to deal with being arrested, and what you do and don't say at the police station?

And I think - people did say to us 'say nothing - they're much less likely to make stuff up if you say nothing', and I was very - I did that. And some of the interviews were horrible - they were abusive and really shouted at you, and other people had things thrown on you, or were dragged about. Or they would separate one out of a group. The first time I was arrested there were lots of us arrested and they put us all in - I don't know, four or five cells, and they put one woman in a cell by herself and stuff, and so they did those kinds of things, and they would say horrible things through the door and stuff to them. And you definitely just learn on the job, because people tell you what's going to happen, but you don't understand it until you do it. And once what's known is so much less frightening than what the unknown is, and I think generally I said nothing all of the time, and that was very true - if you said anything they felt very happy to embellish the story with everything and anything they wanted.

But the fact was you always got found guilty anyway, so it didn't really matter, and they brought the stipendiary magistrate up from London in the January - that's why so many people went to prison, because he came up and went 'I don't accept Greenham as an address, so..' and sent everyone down immediately. And everyone was a bit shocked, because up until that point you got some warning about prison, but suddenly he was sending everybody down. So um, yeah - that was a bit like 'oh, but I haven't brought my toothbrush with me' that kind of thing, so people were doing it all the time, so you saw what happened. And sometimes, I loved court - I absolutely loved the 'I'm going to be the barrister! And I loved all that - asking the questions and not, you didn't stand up when the judge came in, so there was always stated with whatever craziness. But I loved all that trying to catch people out and all the rest of it. Me Annie, we were there one time, and there weren't many people there, but there was one woman with quite severe mental health problems, and it was quite stressful, and she was wanting to keep warm, and it was cold and it was like - I knew a woman who shouldn't have been at camp, but you know, was not being cared for, so we nicked a bit of the council fence, and we burnt it because we couldn't leave her alone with one of us at the camp. And we never did things like that - we never touched council property, but that time we did - we took a bit of that old fashioned twist-y wooden fence, and the soldier rung it in, and the police arrived and arrested us, left this woman by herself - which was a disaster. And when we come up to court - and we had plaits - Annie had long plaits, and I had a plait down the back, and we were like 'oh I'm so embarrassed, we're going to be brought up for something we did which is about council property', and so we said not guilty to it, and we didn't get sent down - they said they needed to collect more evidence, and they put us out and we got a court date, and so when we went back we had everyone wear plaits - we made everyone wooly plaits, and everybody sat in the row behind in the public thing with plaits so we could do, and it was awful - you did that kind of 'can you really pick us out from all the women sat behind us?' Of-course everyone is sat there with these wooly plaits on their heads, and god love the soldier, he went 'no, it really was you two', but then the police arrived, and the two police officers lied. They lied. The first one came up and said a whole thing about how they had seen it, and they whatever, and the next one came up and contradicted the first one's story, and both of them contradicted the soldier who had told the truth. And we had such a laugh that day, and they said they felt like at the end of the thing he went 'I'm throwing this out because the stories have somewhat got confused', and it was awful because we went away going 'we've actually done this one', and it was something we shouldn't have done. But then I loved all that!

Theatre?

I liked the theatre, and I loved that thing of trying to be clever. All those Agatha Christies that I'd learnt to read on, it was a bit like you know, it was another bit, it was enjoyment. I didn't like being locked up, but I liked your day in court a lot.

With prison, what was that experience like?

It was a really - I wouldn't say it's a good thing. I wouldn't. You know. I wouldn't tell anyone to it out. I am claustrophobic. I've never not eaten in my life - I didn't eat for the first four days in prison, and they put me and Annie in the same cell - this was a bit strange, because they put us in with the only woman I met in prison who should have been there, because she was up for like four or five lots of GBH - really quite nasty stuff. She was really someone with very poor mental health, and all over the place, and they put us in a cell with her, who said 'don't speak or I will kill you', so we didn't speak for the fifteen days or whatever that we were in. And because it was new, because Holloway doesn't exist now - it was new Holloway at that point, and the windows are like two inches wide shutters, so I spent quite a bit of time with my lips at the window, breathing and stuff. But it's a funny thing - you immediately become institutionalised in terms of being patted down and all these things. We got out very little - I think there were days and days and days when you didn't get out at all - you just had your food put through the door. But almost everybody I spoke to when I was there shouldn't have been there - they were in for petty theft, for food - for nappies, all that sort of stuff. So many women with poor mental health, so many women who'd come from - they were in because they wanted to get away from the violent relationships they were in outside, so really the only woman I felt like probably needed to be in a cell at some level was the woman in our cell! But it wasn't the place for her, either - do you know what I mean, it was all nonsense. And the psychiatric wing was above you, and people just cried and wailed and it was awful - all night and stuff. Anyway. We did do work on one day - the prison officer came and said 'right, you've got work', and we went 'oh, we're political prisoners' (laughs). And she went 'get off your bunks and get out here'. It was that kind of thing one day we had to wipe clean your cell everyday and she came and went 'you haven't mopped the floor', and I said 'I did it yesterday', and she went 'you mop the floor everyday', and I was like 'okay. And we went and did work, and it was really funny - we had to go and put these little plastic people in toys into the plastic - you know push out thing, and put it in a box, and move it along and things. And you had to do it for two hours, and at one point they went 'that table over there, you camp women, slow down - you're going too fast', and it was like a Patti Smith song - working in the piss factory. 'Slow down, we can't keep up', and it was like oh god - you can't go that slow, so we started putting the stickers in the wrong place and turning them upside down and putting the pneumatic drill into their heads and stuff like that. And for ages afterwards when I was in a toy shop I'd look to see if we could see the ones we'd packed, but that was a bit like, and then you got paid, and I wasn't a smoker, so I was everyone's friend

because it meant I bought tobacco and matches and Rizlas with my spends, and gave a little bit to everybody. So which was, but everybody was lovely - everybody was lovely, and they'd come over and go 'oh there's somebody else - one of your lot is in today, blah blah and stuff'. And there were a lot of women in at that time.

It was one of the things that was new to me, and that I learnt at Greenham was there was that thing about there's a whole load of women in prison because they're poor women - that's why they're there.

Yeah.

Whatever else you dress it up as, and that kind of - well I was trying to figure this out, because here's political prisoners doing political things, and then there's what are these women? And it took me a while to then see that is a real politicisation, isn't it?

It is.

To see that oh right, it's as simple as that really - it makes me sound a bit thick, really, looking back - but I can't explain it better than just to go yeah, it really is as simple as that - it was as simple as that.

And I was I think what shocked me about prison, because you are absolutely powerless, and it's really brought home to you - you are absolutely powerless in prison, and woman were so submissive, and you have to call - the prison officers then - you had to call them 'Miss', and there were all these women who were - who shouldn't have been there, and that whole thing about 'Miss, is it okay? Miss, I'll do this', and it was just like gut wrenchingly awful - all of it. Because it was like none of thee women should be here, and isn't that enough - that you lock them up? But once they're there, it's a bit like you're absolutely being ground down into the dirt to make them as submissive and as powerless as you possibly can, and it was just - and everybody was on drugs - everybody had stuff given out at night and stuff, and it was a bit like on so many levels this is so wrong, and it was awful. Awful to see.

Infantilised?

Completely.

And medicated.

And medicated. And anybody who was pregnant none of them seemed to hang onto their pregnancies when they were in there. Yeah, awful.

Was there anything, what was the attitude from the other women - apart from saying 'there's some of your lot in'?

They were really nice and it was a bit like, and interested. The odd time that we managed to get into what was like the little canteen for the wing - where you had your dinner when you were out, but most of the time you didn't, and you had very little opportunity to speak to other people. You could sense if it was a prison officer who was alright, she would take things from cell to cell - like a newspaper or whatever and people wrote things, or put sweets in or a bit of tobacco or whatever, and send it off - but only with someone who could be trusted to do that. But there was very little opportunity to talk, and you were let out for very, very short amounts of time. And we weren't allowed to talk in our cell, so um. Annie also went to - lots of women went to Rochester? No, I can't think now - where the open prison is, is it Rochester? Fallen out of my head, which is a different set up because it's an open prison. I only went to Holloway because what happened was when I got picked up for non-payment of fines was when the stipendiary was there, so I had lots of pending cases, and not turning up to court and things like that - so I actually got sent down for I don't know - half a dozen obstructions and half a dozen criminal damages, and I was give a week for all the obstructions and two weeks for the criminal damages, but they run the all concurrently, so I can't remember if it was two weeks for, but I only did two weeks before you got let out - so they were all over and done with in the same lot, thank goodness - because I didn't want to make it a habit. Um. Yeah, so people wee really nice and interested, and thought it was really odd that you would choose to be in prison instead of just paying your fine, and I'd say 'well I actually don't have the fine money' - but I could have raised the fine money from peace groups and stuff, but that wasn't the point. So there was a bit of 'god', but you know there were other women in there who were choosing to be in there because it was safer for them to be in there, so it wasn't - not everybody was fazed by that.

How important do you think - in London there was Squatters Movement going on, in the country there was a lot of unemployment - you didn't get sanctioned for finding a place - how important do you think those things were to Greenham Common?

Oh, absolutely. We were squatting at the time, in South London - in Deptford, and was, how long had we been there? Been in that place for two or three years, I think then, and we'd set up like a co-op, and then we got taken under the wing by a housing association later on, but we, but some of us moved out to have a women only house after that. The thing was when you went and signed on they always asked you if you'd been looking for jobs, but of-course in the '80s there really were no jobs - like there are now, but um, but they didn't sanction you in the same way. Of-course they did sanction you if you didn't turn up, or you didn't whatever, but it's a bit like - it makes me laugh when now people say you'd got to look for a job - then you did have

to look for a job, and when I came back from camp, um, because I'd been signing on for a year, I got sent to a skills' centre to do a 10 week programme, and then from then afterwards got sent on programmes all of the time because I was still signing on. So on one level - it was a community programme, and it was after all the YOPs and YOMPs and all those sorts of things, so it was really important, because we did turn up for a year, and we did sign on, and it was enough money for you to get the bus back, or sign on where you lived in Greenham and not be chased. In a lot of ways - we were talking about this in conjunction with the Community Enterprise Allowance scheme, which allowed people to do things for a year, which now if you wanted to be any kind of artist, you could not do, because you have to go and work for free in Big Lukes - do you know what I mean, if you're on the dole for more than a fortnight - or Poundland, which in those days - and that has gone now for working class people - that opportunity to be any kind of artist or any kind of creative practitioner has gone, and that was very interesting, because people might not have had the thousands of pounds, but the Co-Op bank can put it in your account for the day, and then take it back out so you can actually pass to get on and do it, and so being on the dole was that. And it was that interconnectedness - and people were very much on the streets, and it was post all the 1980 riots and things, and so there as a wider politicisation that had gone on, but actually being able to sign on and go and be at camp was really important, which you couldn't do now - you would absolutely have to be self financing, you know.

And so, for example now you have to demonstrate you've spent that fortnight filling in all those application forms.

Yes.

On Enterprise Allowance you didn't have to sign on any more, and I know of one thousand pounds that did the rounds.

Absolutely.

It only had to be there for a week, and then the next person got it. And so, um, I think, and it was within traveling distance of London, wasn't it?

It was a bus ride, and the buses were cheap then, I think a ticket was about £3.50, which was a lot out of your dole money, but actually you lived very cheaply at camp, so that was fine, and it meant that you could be politically active - full time, at that level, and er, not have to like now be booked online for 20 hours a week and do so many applications - you just couldn't have done that.

How much do you enjoy vegetable mush?

I quite like vegetable mush even now! And I was vegetarian for about 30 years, and then I stopped when my daughter was ill. And I cook, and we always cook all of the time from scratch, but I'm not a great cook and I don't much enjoy it, but I eat a lot of vegetable mush still now.

What was your family's reactions - your parents' reaction to you going and doing this?

It was my mum, and she'd remarried as second time, um, and my mum is a political person and completely and utterly supportive of it. And if there was a car available at some times, we would drive to my mum, because it always an hour down south, and we would stay the weekend, and everyone would get a bath and all those kinds of things, and we'd wash all our clothes and stuff. So we did that a few times, and lots of people would come down - I don't know how many we could squish in a car. And my mum was fabulous, because my mum is not a cook, and I'd say oh Kirstin and blah blah are coming mum, and they're vegans, and she'd say 'it's okay, I've got it down now - I know what a vegan is, they don't eat any kind of dairy products or animal products and whatever', and I'd go yeah. And she'd go 'I've got lots of baked beans and a chicken!' And that's every time we went down my mother would have bought a chicken for the vegans! So I still do not understand what the logic was in all of that.

Well it's not made out of milk, is it?

No, no absolutely. 'So no cheese. So breast or leg?!' Yes, so very supportive my mum was.

What about your peers, were all your friends doing this?

No, they weren't, but they like in the squat people were involved in community theatre - that's how we knew each other so people were political, and political in different ways and doing stuff. And London was at that time in the '80s there were demonstrations every weekend for something, and we would be, I mean not when I was at camp, but back in London all through the '80s it was all kinds of politics that people were involved in. I hung about with political people.

Do you think that just can't happen now because you've got to go and do your zero contract job?

Yeah, I think.

Do you think that's deliberate?

Yes, absolutely. All of this is about, in the same way that there are lots of - in the '80s you started to get caught up in things - the flooding of working class areas with drugs, all those kinds of things which were very obvious - there might have been some people that smoked a bit of weed, but suddenly there was no drugs, and then 6 months later council estates were flooded with heroism, and you just think well that wasn't an accident was it? You know, suddenly there wasn't half a dozen blokes on council estates that decided to be drugs entrepreneurs. And I think it's just it's very definitely about people's times - if you're on the dole, for any of these things it's a full time job, and at some level it's increasingly become like that, but with zero hours jobs not knowing when you have to be available - you have to be available, that you have to be doing this, and the amount of bureaucracy and admin that goes with all of these things - it absolutely fills people's times - you're going to be homeless unless you do these things, you're not going to eat next week unless you do these things. Of course it is a plan.

I was thinking about filling time, and going back to what you were talking about earlier - so the daily living took up an awful lot of the time?

Yes.

Did that feel like, um, so once upon a time that would have taken up all of our's time - did that feel quite enjoyable and satisfying to have that?

What I discovered about camp was I really loved loving outside. And I was kind of brought up in the country - I'm not a city person, and I thought I was a city person - coming out as a lesbian I went to London, and that was great there were other lesbians that live in London, and I know there are lesbians that live in Southampton, but I didn't really find them. But I kind of grew up out of the town most of the time - we moved house like every 6 months and stuff, and um, I never considered myself a country person, and I still don't - (whispers) I don't like the country, I think it's malevolent, and the small places are scary places - but don't tell anybody I said that. Anyway, but um I loved living outside, and I now - living in the cold - 25 years in the North East, I hate the fucking cold! It's a bit like you can't be outside because it's too cold, and I really regret that. I have a partner that doesn't like change, and I want to drag her somewhere warmer - we can't afford to go anywhere warmer, do you know what I mean, but I loved being outside, and I loved all that practical job stuff that we did - and maybe not forever, but I still now think, and I never thought about it - until I was asked to do this, the differences it made - and I went yeah, I really, really still miss it a lot, and I've never really - I've never done it since.

You've never gone on camping holidays?

Yes I do, I have gone on camping holidays. My partner doesn't like camping, so, and when I got together with her 20 years ago now - we had a bit more money, because me and my daughter we'd go to Greece every summer when she born, and my daughter's nearly 29, and we would camp on the beach in Greece for the whole of the holidays, and so, and that was just fabulous. And I love the sea, I love being warm, I love being outside, so that was fabulous. But then I got together with Pam and we have a bit more money, so we stay in rooms when we go somewhere - cheap rooms, but not under canvas.

Do you think you'd ever do a fortnight in the wild somewhere?

I think physically I don't feel brilliant at the moment, um, but I do have those dreams about we need to just be somewhere - we live in a two up, two down - it's not huge, but there is just two of us in it now, although grandchildren stay and things like that. We could easily live in a smaller space, we're not tied to having much room at all - we could easily live in a room a lot of the time and I think could do that. Surely we could find somewhere where we'd have more outside and it might be warmer, and I do think about that. Land is one of my things that I'm very very interested in land and land politics that you know, we couldn't afford to do it - we couldn't afford to buy literally 20 square feet somewhere, but you know.

Do you think it was the outside or do you think it was the collective?

It was all of it - all of those things, and when think about it, it's a very strong presence in my life. I am not a joiner, I think that's partly about being a lesbian, that you grow up always on the outside and having a lot of shit thrown at you for that, like even my mother saying 'I know you're more left wing than the Labour Party, but you need to be in the Labour Party to do blah blah, because this is how we're going to change things', and whatever, and I'm back in the party again now since Corbyn . And I struggle with a lot of local politics because the want to talk about the kids on the park - well that's where they should be. All those kind of small minded you know, small 'c' conservative type of stuff that drives me mad, and I get sucked into doing things. My daughter keeps going 'you're joining in community politics' because I'm not that person - I like doing all the other things, and I'll work all day everyday doing a million things, but I am not really the person who is going to be at the middle of community activities in the village - do you know what I mean? But I think that's about being a lesbian. Woman next door to us lived 30 years - Pam doesn't speak to her, never speaks to her because she's a lesbian - she's a pillar of the Methodist church on the corner, and villagers are afraid, and are full of those people. Half of the street doesn't speak to us because we're lesbians, didn't speak to Sian my daughter - didn't at school because she's a child of lesbians. So I do, I have I should be doing these things, I have my mother's voice in my head going you need to do these things,

because I do think the answer is collective, I do think it's about how we change things - it's at grass roots level, it's at collective, at cooperative level - that's how we do it - at community level, but I don't really find it easy, and I'd rather be the person doing some things in that and then stepping out of it and letting other people get on with it, so both those things. And I like being outside. I am someone who likes being by themselves, I get done in by lots and lots and lots of stuff all the time - people and blah blah blah, but actually my politics are about we need to do these things together, and we're so alienated and isolated in our front rooms with our televisions and with our social media and all the rest of it, and although social media might be marvelous for some things, I feel like it still divides us more than it puts people together.

Do you think you also maybe need to have the place - given that you are in a small village - that this is the place where you are at home, and maybe the collective action could happen in a bigger place?

Yes, I think so, and I think if I had more money that is exactly what I would do. There are things centrally that in Tyne and Wear - in Gateshead and Newcastle that I would pay a much bigger role, but we don't have any money, and at the end of the day we have a shitty bus service - huge cuts that places like Gateshead you know, Labour - and there is less money in Gateshead than there is - Gateshead is a substantially poorer place than Newcastle, there's a bit of money in Newcastle - there isn't in Gateshead - people are poor. And we're not those poor people, but we don't have any money. If you want to go anywhere you have to keep a car, and you have to drive and what I found is for us to keep our heads above water, which includes me going on holiday in the summer usually because I can't bear not being warm for two weeks - which is terrible. We used to go on the train, and I can't afford to do that anymore, is that we work and we do a lot of stuff, and we do a lot of stuff for other people - we're close to people in the Columbian community and stuff here, and there are all sorts of things that we are kind of a part of which aren't strictly to do with village politics, they're you know, they might be about other things - about refugee stuff, land stuff, money stuff, political education - there are things that I would like to do loads more work that I have done in the past that I can't now because I can't afford it - can't afford to run the car back in and out and in and out all the time. And I work long hours - the jobs I've been doing as a painter and decorator partly through choice is a) people here haven't got any money, so they want you to do it for almost nothing, people want you to do it cheaper because you're a woman, and they also want you to clean their houses at the same time which does my fucking head in, but if I go away to do it a) people pay me a bit more money to do it, and I just do it and it's not here, and people aren't endlessly saying 'will you paint my ceiling for £10?', and so I do that - but that's not how I want to live - I end up staying in a house in the middle of the fucking Cumbrian moors for 3 weeks/4 weeks because I can't afford to come home everyday - I do that 'what am I doing?' This is not what my life or anyone's life should

look like - this is not changing anything, this is just paying the bills, and I hate that. And I feel like I'm in a funny place now because I feel like I'm not able to be politically - in my day job, which I was for a long time, even if I had no money. I'm not able to do that, I'm not at some level - I'm back in the party, there's five hundred leaflets on the table which will need to be in people's doors in the next couple of days. I am supposed to be doing a job this week, which I'm like I'm not quite sure how I'm going to get it all done. But that's not really enough, and not really what I'm interested in, and not what my strengths are either.

Do you think that, um, you're not a joiner, but do you think that Greenham was the most like how you would want politics to be?

Yes, and I think because it gave, I think some of the things which I think are most important about it is what we touched on before about how people are politicised, and it was a bit like well, this is what it looks like. People come and you talk, and you talk about everything and anything, and you might come for one reason, but what you learn about is how, the inter-dependence of it all. How other things are connected. How things are structural, and how that you have agency in that, but you know, as that old man with the beard said 'you make decisions, but not in the conditions that you choose', and I absolutely believe that, and I think that's why you could see women's heads move you could see 'oh my god', they lie about what's happening in Ireland - it is a war and they are killing people, this is what's happening. You know we allow companies to go and cut the heart out of African countries and exploit people and make millions, and then pump guns and whatever into places - do you know what I mean, to make money, do you know what I mean? And we're a part of that, you know, and I don't think my life is privileged but it is privileged because it is based on poverty and oppression of other people. And you could see people - you could see it, going 'oh my god, oh my god I didn't know that', and you could see it - the fact that I came because I think domestic violence and domestic abuse was the most important thing, but now I see that is part of a big picture - that is not about one woman in her house, that is about women and about poor people on the planet, and these things are massive. But being at camp was you saw that, and you saw it and it didn't matter if it was about people saying for the first time 'I've never told anybody about this, but I was sexually abused', and then half the people in the bender would do 'so was I, so was I' and people would speak things that they'd never - an 80 year old woman sat there going 'my father sexually abused me, and it's the first time that I've told anybody, and it was a bit like that power of putting speaking things, and calling things and understanding how it fits into those big picture was really powerful - in the same way that taking action made you brave, you knew that you could change things, and you could change things on a level that I am not, I am not a pushover, and my agency is important, and maybe I haven't demolished the whole of the industrial you know weaponry complex today, but this is how we're going to do it.

All those things, you understand how it all fits together even if you don't understand how it all fits together, but you go from people coming with quite simple conspiracy theories to going 'oh no,' you know, if we look at history and we look at what happens there - this is what happened at this time in this space and now it's happening there. And how did people do that, how did the history of that people, who stopped that and changed that - what did they do, how can we learn from that? What did the Maoris do? They did that - because someone from New Zealand tells you, and you go 'wow', so that hopefully you're confirming some of that stuff about your privilege and about imperialism and about all those kinds of things, you know - Sheila Rowbotham - how that got hidden from history, how that is the case for everybody in the world who has less time and space, and so that - those were incredible things to see - tangible - that you can feel the electricity. You know, and women came from - the miner's strike broke out that year, and they would come down and they would bring stuff and come down and talk about it, and we started to go to London and collect money and we used to go to Nottingham because that was where there was a lot - miners in some of the miners in Nottingham who chose to work, and as women, bunches of women in cars, you could get through the blockades - they would look at you, and you'd be a bunch of punks, and we'd say 'we're going to see a band', and they'd go 'oh, go on, go through' - when they were stopping men, or more respectable looking women, so we could go on picket lines, or we could bring money and stuff. So those ideas about, and that thing about that rippling out, so then you had Greenham women standing on picket lines with men who would say 'I hate lesbians' - 'well we're lesbians' - 'you're lesbians? Maybe I don't hate lesbians' - that kind of, you know, that idea that, and again and you're probably going to ask that, but I'll say it anyway. It's a long time ago, and all those women went away, but I believe it did not change their life - it changed their lives and it didn't matter what it fed into and who they had those conversations with, it changed another, you know, million people's lives because of what happened. We just don't - we've forgotten in some ways about how it affected us, and all those, and that we stopped talking about - I stopped talking about it, and I should be saying, and I do it a bit more since i talked to that young woman who said she didn't know nothing about it, a couple of years ago, I say I was at camp - it's funny, that's what happened when we were at camp, and we've lost that, so.

One of the interviewers - quite a few of them were of a certain age, but one was a young woman, and she said 'I never even knew this thing happened'. And I asked her, 'is that down to us? Do we have a responsibility to talk?' Because I don't think we thought let's not talk about it - I suspect, as usual we were busy doing other things.

Yeah, absolutely.

But do you think it's, it's a time when it needs to be told because otherwise there is always a forgetting that happens.

Yes. And we're old - who were there, and like lots of things you know stuff dies out with people. A lot of women I was at camp with are actually already dead, and sometimes I think because there was the nuclear stuff under the ground that they came out with a few years ago and said 'yeah, there'd been a spill in the '50s', so we were all basically sitting on what was kind of living plutonium or whatever, and so obviously people are going to get a lot of weird things and die. But generally yeah, and it's not written down - or it's written down in the odd sociology book when people have talked about it, but I think it's important - that thing about reinventing stuff all of the time and about ways that we work, and I think it's important - I'm not dissing social media and all the rest of it, but I think it's interesting things like the Arab spring and stuff, when things kicked off in Tunisia they blocked the phone masts, and people were getting nothing on their phones, so they went out into the streets to find out what was happening, and that's when things kicked off, because actually it's not enough to do things in isolation and to do things online and whatever - you need to stand and one of the things - I worked in political education, and I like working with youth and community groups, because you sit in a group of people and they have a conversation and that for me is the times, like when you were sitting in a bender or around the fire, when people leap, and they go 'blah blah blah bah blah' 'oh I never thought about that', and every group I've ever taken from when we've done whatever it is about - I have learnt things, and I have changed my mind and I know that's a kind of cliched thing to say but it's true. You know, a 14 year old says - this young girl 'I never thought about it like that', and that's when you do it in a group of people, and it doesn't matter who they are, and I think you need to talk about it, and we need to say those things.

So there needs to be some more getting together in real life as they call it?

Yeah, absolutely.

What would you say the legacy of Greenham is?

I think er, I think I've mentioned the things for me, I was thinking about things because we're in a time now where there's a lot of stuff, you know again I'm not putting it down, but there's a lot of stuff about identity politics, and there's a lot of stuff - that whole thing about individualising, which comes from the '80s but er, everything got individualised - Thatcher's stuff about there is no society, and we continue that. Everything is about individuals, and there's an awful lot on the good side about personal development and about people being, who hang on....is great, but for me change is about collective action. I'm not someone who has lost - my political

stuff is about that, and I'm very interested in things about different forms of economics, about things - I'm very interested in how we change land ownership and those kind of things more than, I wouldn't say I've been involved in lesbian and gay politics, or even women's stuff at some level, even though I think my most probably shaping experiences of my life were in women only spaces like Greenham, but that's not where I've chosen to be, and I think that's probably one of the legacies of camp that it's actually people didn't go in with one thing - well there was vaguely an anti-nuclear, but people came with all sorts of different kinds of life experiences and thoughts, and they went in the same way - they went out into the world in all sorts of spaces and took that experience and those ideas, and that thought process. And I think that is a legacy, the fact is for me that is the strength of it - that we didn't all come out going oh this is what we need to do this one thing is the priority for my work and my life, because actually that's not what worked. What worked was all those different things being strung together to understand how they are a big part of the big picture, and how a logging company in Bangladesh is as important to understand the destruction and how that fits with that big picture as it is the, you know, something that we have cuts on our street now because of the council cuts - because of austerity. It's that, and I think that is a legacy - that all those women went back out into all sorts of different places and worked in different ways, and some was very - it was in a very individual, or very women, or very lesbian centered kind of way, and for others it was completely different - it was anti-war or whatever. So yes, I think that's a legacy, I think the idea of how things trying together, how we are not the people we are prescribed, and as a whole sex we are - that whole cliché Greenham women are everywhere - but we are everything, and I think we understood that - god I think now when you look at how small you know power tries to make women's lives and young women's lives and I just think oh my god, it's a bit like we have to break that out with the axe the boy took to camp, you know, because that's from a person who believes entirely in non-violence I get really mad and I want to shout, and I want to kill people all of the time - but I wouldn't. You know.

So, when we say Greenham women are everywhere, they really are?

Yeah.

They all went somewhere.

They all went somewhere, and they talk to people - even if we've stopped doing it now.

This is just a reaction of mine - I just said they...

We!

We! I keep forgetting, and also lots of interviewees keep saying people as well...

I know.

...and we've lost the habit of just saying...

Saying women. Absolutely. I'm always talking about pregnant people, and I'm a bit like when did that nonsense get into my head? You know?

That's potentially much more political!

And I really don't want to have that debate.

No, but just simply I've noticed it in all these interviews - we're saying 'people', we actually mean women and that's one of my take homes to go right, okay hold on a minute, it was women around the campfire that had those thoughts, and it was 'we'.

Yes. And I think it's you know, people say 'oh things don't go back' - like in that modernist idea that things only get better and more liberal and whatever, and god it is not true. We lost so much in the '80s, that we never got back, that we fought for, and we've lost substantially again in the last few years, and you don't get them back unless you fight for them, and unless you hang onto them. And you talk about them, actually - and I talk about - like this young woman who is a painter and decorator, and a young woman who is wanting to be an electrician at Gateshead, and she was talking about it, and she was the only one amongst I don't know 180 boys and her, and I was going you had these things that were women's kills centres - there was one in Gateshead and stuff, and she'd go 'what do you mean?' Where you learn a new trade with women instructors, and then - I think the Southwark Women's Workshop is one of the only ones that continues to you know, to function, and I said they were wiped out in the cuts in the '80s when we actually started to have women going into something as little as traditionally male trades and stuff, breaking into that - which has gone again - completely and wiped out. We lose stuff all of the time, you know we're losing our refuges - which were not the answer, they were just a short term answer for something and we don't even have those anymore - it's a bit like it will all get taken from you unless we fight for it, you know.

On which note.

Stop!

(Laughs)

Or we could go on forever.

Thank you very much.

Thank you very much.