

Leah Thalman and Diana Proudfoot

It was either '83 or '84, or '82 and '83, I think more likely to be '83 and '84, but I can't tell you exactly.

So, so that would have been at the height of the sort of media frenzy, '83 was very much, and then '84 was all about them trying to evict, you wasn't it?

Yeah.

That was quite - must have been.

Oh, yeah.

So you didn't choose easy times to be there?

Yeah.

So what what made you go, what happened?

Well, I read about the walk from Wales to Greenham common, and I thought that was very inspiring. And so did a friend of mine. So we went once twice, just to see what it was about. We really liked it, and we thought we'd really like to go , and that was it. We went together.

And that wasn't - what was happening in your life at the time to allow you?

Well I was married, and I have five children, but they were all grown up. The youngest was 20 ish - Rita.

Rachel.

Rachel. So I, you know, I could go, my husband and I were not an easy stage. So we, my friend and I just started off. We took tents.

Fantastic. And um, did you - how did you end up going to Green Gate? Where did you go first? Because it was quite tribal, wasn't it?

Well, you see I had been for the odd day and I expect I'd seen Green - I like the look of Green Gate, I suppose. I don't know, really, but I did like it there.

So what was it particularly that was - because Green Gate has a reputation of being quite sort of um, spiritual and for want of a better word, people have described it as hippy.

Yeah, it was spiritual. Yeah, yes, and I liked the surroundings. It was nicer than Yellow Gate, which was on a sort of on the main road. Green was lovely and surrounded by trees and everything.

Right. Okay. And how many women were there when you sort of - approximately. I mean was it was it? Sort of 20 people?

20 - could have been 20 ish, you know.

And did you, my, did you sleep in tents?

We started off in, we took tents, but then we built a bender - you know about those, I'm sure. So my friend Barbara and I built a bender and we lived in that.

And, and how was that?

Lovely, very cosy.

Was it?

Very cosy benders are, yeah.

You see, that's not what you expect at all. You kind of think of it as - you know.

Yeah, they're cosy.

So you, I get the impression you must have been quite a tough woman, because I think it's a, ou know, you didn't have access to water, didn't have toilets, obviously.

There were shit pits.

Yes. Lots of people have talked about the shit pits, yes! So and what was the relations like with the rest of the camp?

Um, alright, every now and then we'd take a walk right around the base and call in at the other camps, and yeah, they were good, yeah.

And er, how did you find out about um, er, protests or demonstrations, blockades or things that were going on?

How did we find out?

Yeah. Was it just - would people just come around and say this is what's going on?

Yeah. Word of mouth from.

And was that something you wanted to do?

Oh yeah!

(Laughs). And what sort of demonstrations did you take part in?

Well, we used - one I do remember quite well, this was another woman there called Margaret and she was, what does...

She must have been about 75 then.

75 she was, and it was going to be her birthday next day. So we got up um, very early in the morning and we all went into the base. (Laughs). And we found a building and hovered round there. And then they caught us, took us into this building and arrested us. And there was a young MOD plod who arrested us, and we all sort of gave him three chairs because it was his first arrest. Looked rather bashful.

You made him a card, didn't you?

Oh, yes, I made him a card. Yes. We decorated the bit where we were with flags and all sorts. Yeah, that's the sort of thing we did. You know.

There was the bicycle protest, as well.

Oh yes, there was the bicycle protest. We took bikes - we rode into the base and took our bikes and rode around.

It sounds like breaking into the base was relatively easy?

Really what?

Relatively easy.

Yeah, it wasn't that difficult. We often did it at night.

Just needed a decent pair of bolt cutters.

And so is that how you did it? You had to get through the, the...

Through the wire.

Through the fence.

Got these bolt cutters, and you cut all the way down, tinkle tinkle tinkle, and then you got in. Yeah.

And what was the - your relationships like with the MOD police and the military?

Well, we were a little bit sort of mocking towards the police. (Laughs). Weren't we? We weren't cruel, but we did mock them.

In what way?

Just made up silly little rhymes about them - what were they now?

Can't remember. Having said that, the RAF regiment that were on duty on the base perimeter. And at that time there was very high unemployment. And a lot of young men from less privileged backgrounds than I would say quite a few of the women at Greenham, were on duty there, and I felt it was, I felt it was not right to mock them, because they were probably doing that because whatever else could they do? And sometimes there was a certain amount of, shall we say 'au ter' (spelled phonetically)? That was not right.

But we never were unpleasant to the police. We were just sort of mocking them in a laughing, friendly way.

And how did they respond to that?

They weren't too bad. Yeah.

So when you got arrested, was - how was, um, did you did you end up going to prison or was it was - did they let you go? Did they charge you?

They charged you, and you were given, you know charged you, and we refused to pay the fine. So eventually we went to prison - well I did anyway, some people didn't.

Which prison did you go to?

She's been nine times to prison!

Really?

Holloway, Holloway. What's the one beginning with 'R', gosh my brain sorry, one in Surrey called Cookham Wood, Holloway, one in Manchester.

Styal - do you mean Styal? You went to Styal.

Briefly.

Right.

And you and I went together to Newbold, but that wasn't for Greenham, that was more protests later on.

Right.

About five prisons, I think.

And, and why did they send you to different prisons? Surely - aren't you supposed to be in a prison that's close to your home?

I can't answer that, I don't know.

Just their decision.

I don't know.

And what was, what was that like?

Very, very interesting indeed. Prison is very soulless place. I decided to um, be a bit sort of laid back and, for instance one morning this screw

came in and told me to make my bed, and she said 'I'll show you how to do it, it goes in a certain order,' and she made it all up - it looked like a sort of three coloured ice cream, and then she took it all away and said 'I'll be back in 20 minutes, and I hope it's done.' So I decided just to be rather dim, and I just fooled about with this blanket, and that was when she came back, and I said 'is that alright?' And she looked at me, and she knew I was mocking her. That was the sort of thing. And if we all had to go somewhere, I was always lagging behind, you know.

And um, what about the inmates - how did they react?

Inmates. They were good, they were interested in us, yes, they were fine.

In what way were they interested?

Oh, what did they say?

Well, when when we went into Newbold prison....

Don't forget your drink.

We had - we did an action up at RAF Capenhurst on the Wirral, um, which was more you know, symbolic than anything else. And we walked, we walked into Newbold down the passageways to the cells, and when I, when I got into my cell, of course, there's a big notice as you go into prison that you mustn't discuss with other prisoners the reason why you're there. Well, of-course it's the first thing anybody does. Why don't they! 'Oh, are you Greenham?' 'Who you are, where you from? Are you CND?' I said 'Well, no.' 'Are you Greenham?' I said 'Well, yes, sort of. Yeah.' And they, I said 'What makes you think that might be why I'm here.' And she said this, this young woman, she just was really struggling to find out what she wanted, so in the end, she said 'Well, you've got that liberated look' - aww, and so many of those...

that's the most fantastic compliment. If somebody said that to me, I'd be delighted!

But you know, it was also sad, Sarah, because so many of those women were there because the system of everything is so disadvantageous to women from certain backgrounds, and with certain life experiences. And there were a number of women in Newbold certainly, who were there because they'd finally - the worm had turned, and a young lass, she'd burned down her stepfather's pub, why? Because he'd be abusing her. A woman who took a kitchen knife to her boyfriend because he'd been beating her up, she didn't kill him, but she was in for GBH, and various other things. So a lot of - and quite a number of those women. Yah, it was a whole social commentary, a whole social commentary.

And did some of those women then come to Greenham afterwards, do you think?

Well not that I know of, not that I know of.

Right. Yeah, that must have been...

I think their lives were too heavy.

Too oppressed, you know, too oppressed.

And I've heard that um, there's an organisation called Women in Prison, and that some of the - it was some of the experiences that Greenham women had that started that...

I didn't know about that.

... campaign off. Yeah, so yeah.

As our friend Margaret, who was in her mid 70s said, and she was sent to Styal at the age of 75. And she said 'When I went in a peace campaigner, I came out a prison reformer.'

Yeah. Yeah, that's that's a very, that's very poignant, isn't it? And I think Greenham, it seems that that it was more than more than a peace camp, I think. People talk about it in terms of its network and influence to the women's movement particularly, but that also to prison and to the non-violent direct action that has come afterwards and so on.

But the non-violent direct action was there before, and, and really was why they wanted to set up a camp that didn't have men. Because it wasn't - because the view was, rightly or wrongly, that men were more programmed and, and, and socialised into making violent responses, and the women took on the norm - rather as Quakers do, I suppose - a non-violent approach to these things. So that, and they felt they would do that better in a women only camp.

And do you think that was, do you think that was true? Did that - was that borne out?

Yeah, I think it was. In-fact, one - do you remember that time we were at Greenham at Green Gate, Leah, and there was a big protest. It was um, massive demo. And this French woman she slashed the tyres of the police car.

Oh, yes.

Do you remember that?

Yeah. We told her off.

We did because this is not okay. This is this is against our ethos of non-violence.

And that - having - I've watched Carry Greenham Home.

Oh, did you?

Which was, and I think that really - because I've got the songbook, songbook's online, I've got PDFs and there's lots of drawings. It's absolutely beautiful. And it really - so first of all, it really brings the songs to life, as in terms of them not just being songs, but almost being a war cry. Purring on the recording! (Laughs). So is that - was that how you felt about it - the songs that you know you weren't just singing them, they were a battle cry almost?

Well, we didn't think in terms of battles.

We didn't use that phrase.

No, I wouldn't actually.

Or resistance, let's say.

I suppose it was resist - non-violent resistance. And you know.

We never felt angry.

No.

I can't ever remember feeling angry. It was just funny and never felt angry.

And, sorry go on.

Do you remember that time, Leah, we went in the base at night, you and me, and one or two other women. And we got almost to the area where the nuclear warheads were kept, you know, where there was the famous dancing on top.

Yeah.

And, and we nearly - we tried to go into this building. And we were rumbled by this black Air Force, man, you know, American Air Force

man. And he just grinned broadly, and er, we, we were arrested. But you know, you could see that he obviously thought it was quite funny.

Well, and I guess because you weren't um, you know, what you were doing was proving the defences were -it was so, I mean that mocking and humiliation I think was quite, was incredibly powerful. I found.

I mean, if this is - if a bunch of women can get that close to a load of nuclear warheads, what about your security? It's poor.

Yeah, yeah, and I've heard that they didn't used to arrest you actually in the American side of the base or that, so women have told me that they didn't want the arrest reports to show that you are actually, you know, in the base, you know, having a picnic or you know, whatever it was that you were doing. Is that something that you remember?

What's that?

Sorry.

They didn't want to arrest women in the base.

They didn't want to?

But they didn't arrest you in the base, didn't they?

Yeah, of-course they did, yeah. They did.

I think it was in the, the American, because there was, there was a perimeter that was was still um British, yeah right inside was the American side, and they had cells in there as well, didn't they?

Oh right. I think some women had a very hard time when they were arrested on the base, Leah. Because there was one where the, the plods were bashing her about, and throwing her about the room. But, I can't I can't give you time and date, and name for that. So.

Yeah, it's, I mean, it sounds like - so what I was going to say is looking at Carry Greenham Home, because the um, sort of um, you know, it was, it was quite intense - some of the blockades, and some of the bailiffs, the evictions, particularly the, the scene with the bailiff in Carry Greenham Home is quite um, upsetting, distressing. And it must have been sometimes quite difficult. From my perspective, from my perspective to not react violently or not get angry?

I don't know, I never felt like reacting violently. I thought the whole thing was funny all the time. It was, no, I'm sorry, but that's how it was to me.

That's good.

To me. It was good fun. No, we were angry with that woman for slashing those tyres.

Yes.

But never angry at the base itself.

So, um, what sort of er, non-violent direct action was the sort of thing that you engaged in - it was it was cutting, cutting the wires and going into the base?

Cutting the wires and then Jin had managed to switch the lights off in the base, didn't she?

(Laughs).

A friend of ours.

She managed - we were out one night round the base, and it was really good because the plods had traditional policeman's helmets so you could see them when they were looming up out of the blue. But then

they eventually went on two flat caps, but one night we were out and Jin, a friend, she was really handy. She was very practical. And she, she shimmied up, and managed to, managed to break the circuit on the perimeter lights. And they all went out. (Laughs).

Fantastic.

A lot of people - you know people were very enterprising.

And that I think that's the other thing that that seems to have wrong footed the military and the police is how creative you were, in terms of your resistance, in terms of your demonstration?

Totally creative. Yeah, very.

And that, that's and there was that space for that creativity, because everybody at the base agreed that this was to be non-violent.

Right. Okay. And, and in part would you say because it was women only?

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely it was. Um, I'm not, I'm not saying that women can't sometimes be violent, that would clearly be wrong, but but that was, you know, that was just the ethos and that was what we did.

And so Diana, when did you start going down?

In 1984. I was going down a weekend a month, and sometimes taking my daughter with me. And um, by then I came to you at Green Gate, didn't I, because Leah and her friend Barbs, who died some years ago, they were there. And we had a coach - sometimes we had coaches down from Derby, and sometimes I just went by car and parked it. And I remember once when you were living at Emerald, and I got the car parked just off the road.

Just going to put my hearing aid in.

When I came, when I came to that car - we were going to, my daughter and I were going to go home, somebody had scratched a huge swastika on the bonnet.

Oh my god.

I know it was a bit horrible. It was dead creepy. And as well as expensive because you can't go around driving a car with a swastika, on the whole. I had to get it all done. Leah, do you think Sarah would like to see that little album of photographs?

Yeah, yeah, it's here.

Because if you're...

So how old was your daughter?

She was about 19...She was about 12, and she absolutely loved it. You know if you're at Green Gate or Emerald, the kids just used to go, go rushing around in the woodland, and you could just let them, and it was for them it was like playing, I don't know - Famous Five or something like that. And you just, you just let, just let them all go off and they just kind of wilded themselves in the woods. It was nice.

Fantastic.

Just check if it's...

Put my specs on and know what I'm doing. Of-course, as you've seen, we've all got older.

(Laughs). Yes. Well, you know, I was 15 in 1981. So, you know.

Did you know about it?

I did. Yeah. My dad was in the military. So um, it was very - I just, I guess I just didn't know what to think. Andover family was very, you know, it was very traditional, you know, in rural Dorset, so we just had the you know, what was on the TV, and I think I was just quite scared by the whole, you know, I was scared by the nuclear threat. I just I wouldn't have even known how to, how to get it - I think if it had been more local to me, I would have definitely gone down and had a look. But um, yeah, you know, my, my dad was definitely not not a fan. He was ex military by that time. I think he was anyway. But, yeah, it was, you know, the whole kind of how it was presented was, you know, what do these silly women think they're doing? You know, what difference is it going to make, you know, and and, of course, it did make a huge difference.

It was kind of also like a university of the open air because there was debate - sometimes quite strenuous debate, discussion, disagreement and all the rest of it and, and you learnt a whole lot about, about yourself about, about, about politics, about the position of women, and spirituality and a whole range of things.

It was like a university, wasn't it?

It was like the open air university, not the Open University! (Laughs).

So was it, would you say it was like sort of consciousness raising type of vibe there?

Consciousness raising, Leah, or not?

Consciousness?

Consciousness raising.

That sort of, you know, the personal being political type stuff?

Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

Very much there was that. Yeah.

And so was it, was it would you say it was a feminist?

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

About people learning, you know where their feminism lay - feminism was quite a broad church, or certainly these days it is.

Yes. And yes it is. And it was, I suppose, but it was very much issues around, you know, (sighs) you know, nuclear weapons being a rather extreme example of the patriarchy, and that sort of destructiveness - the destruction of the earth, the destruction of future generations, you know, that women had given birth to and so on. Yeah, there was that kind of vibe.

And do you think there was a, er, were there some camps that were more friendly for people who had - who brought children down and others that that were less - I mean, not unfriendly, but just sort of less appropriate for, less comfortable for people with children?

People with children?

Do you think some of the gates were more friendly towards women with children than not?

It's hard to say, because if you weren't living at a particular gate we wouldn't know about that - about what was going on.

You know, if, if you spoke to women at other gates, they might have a view on that.

Yeah, I mean, I guess one of the reasons I ask is because I've interviewed a few women who didn't have children, and they've said that they were, and in-fact most of them weren't Blue Gate.

Yeah.

Which was...

I mean there weren't many children there living all the time.

But it was more children as visitors.

Right. Okay. And when did the evictions start? The evictions?

They went on all the time.

Were they?

Yeah. Yeah.

When you first when there?

From when we first went to the base. The bailiffs would come round and evict everything.

And what did they used to do - just - would they destroy it, or take it...

Just take it all away - had a great big van. We made up jokes about the bailiffs too, I can't remember the particular one.

And was, was it the same - were the bailiffs the same people each time?

Yeah, yeah.

And. Sorry. Go on, Diana.

So you, there was one of the head bailiffs - do you remember his name, Leah? One of the head bailiffs?

Can't at the moment. We had a joke about him, didn't we? Wish I could remember. I can't.

And what was your - given that they were the same people - did you build friendships?

We didn't build friendships, but we just mocked them a bit, like everything else we did - we sort of laughed at them.

Because I wasn't ever there when there was an eviction because I wasn't actually living there. But I did get arrested a few times on the base, though.

If we knew there was going to be an eviction, we'd clear all our stuff into - there's a bit in, near the camp, where you could safely put things.

The sanctuary.

The sanctuary.

Ah right okay, that was - was that the land that Yoko Ono bought?

Did she?

I think she did.

I'm not sure about that.

But there was the one or two caravans with some former Yellow Gate people in there for quite a while afterwards, but at that time you put stuff in the sanctuary didn't you, Leah?

So who took these photographs? Because you know, must have been quite difficult to have a camera and...

Don't know who took the photographs. That's me and my friend that I went with.

Fantastic.

There's some in there that I took, but they're colour ones and they're later on.

And so was this, was this going on all the time - people putting signs of life, you know, sort of celebrations of life on the fence?

Well not cutting all the time. I mean, you'd cut at night obviously, when it was dark and you couldn't be seen doing it.

Did they put...

Unless there was a particular celebration, which there sometimes was.

Sometimes you put - how often did people hang things on the fence?

How often?

Did they hang things on the fence - was that all the time or just some of the time?

No, only occasionally.

And was, were the soldiers, when you put things, you know, pictures - there's some very personal and intimate things here - would they take them off and throw them away?

Well these were on our side of our side of the fence, you see.

Right.

I don't remember what happened to them.

Because it looks - when you talk about it sounds quite, it sounds quite calm and reasonably well organised - and when you see the pictures, it looks, it looks, it looks quite chaotic - what's that?

Ah that must be an eviction, I think.

Yeah.

Evictions were chaotic weren't they?

Yeah, I bet they were. And would that have been...

Sorry, Leah might know that better, because I wasn't there on those occasions.

That just seems to be a meeting.

Oh - the money, do you remember the money meeting?

Yeah.

Oh gosh!

Could have been - too big for a money meeting.

So what were the money meetings for?

Money meetings were about what to do with money we'd been given - sums of money, and that could cause dissension occasionally. Some very young women from rather poorer backgrounds who want - they saw it as an opportunity to um, go to places didn't they? They'd not had

that freedom before. Could be a bit difficult over the money, as far as I remember.

And was it for the money for the, that particular gate, or was it the money for the, for the camp as a whole?

No, for the camp in general.

And so would the money meetings happen at Yellow Gate, then?

Depends - it could happen at different gates.

Right. Right. And how did those conflicts get resolved, given that it was a collective?

(Exhales). Don't know, I can't remember. I don't know they did. I mean, but it wasn't anything very, very serious. It was just perhaps the one thing that you could look back and think about was a point of dissension.

And, um, were there - so in terms of the, you know, the conversations that people had around the campfire that presumably there would be arguments and discussions and things like that, but nothing - um, no deep conflicts because.

No.

But there did seem to be some later on, didn't there?

No there weren't deep conflicts earlier on, no.

No, I think it was later when the whole thing around Yellow Gate came to the fore, and different views of - different feminist views, and the whole thing about you know, racism, that was quite big, wasn't it? But for understandable reasons.

What was the issue around racism?

Was there an issue?

Because there were people who thought that Greenham - I think you're supposed to sign up to a particular view about racism.

Really?

Don't you remember that, Leah?

No.

Gosh, I can't remember now - but...

It's a good thing she's here isn't it!

Well, it's always good when there's two of you, I've interviewed people on their own. And I've interviewed them in twos, and sometimes it's quite it's much easier when people are bouncing off each other.

Yeah, and I'm losing my memory bit. I'm 90.

I'll let you off! I'm nearly 53 and I'm losing my memory a bit.

Really?

Yeah.

Watch it! I was that sort of age when I was at Greenham.

Stuff I kept...

So what was the age of the women at Green Gate?

Um, I should say that I was one of the older ones. Most of them were that bit younger. Yeah, I was, one of the older ones.

And what did your husband think about you going to Greenham?

Well, he was in support of the whole thing because he went to um what's that one - I'll ask Diana in a minute, and he went to prison after going to camp in the east - what's the name of that camp that Julius went to?

Oh, Molesworth.

Molesworth. So he was in full support. Yeah.

Right.

Yeah.

So, but then the whole questions about sexuality. Now this is about the - that's about Wages for Housework. Have you heard of that?

Yeah. I've heard the name.

And there was a big dispute. I found that - so that's a kind of declaration about you know.

And what, did you think it had some merit, this issue?

Me personally I wasn't really involved in it, and it sort of it broke upon Greenham in a rather kind of ooh, goodness me, just quite difficult to get my head round it really. I wasn't particularly involved, you know.

No, it's - because it does sound that like it was that it did get quite nasty?

It did get quite nasty. Yeah. And it was very - if you went, if you went to Yellow camp or anything, some of the women there would 'Oh here come the tourists.' Like we weren't serious - do you remember that? If

you went to Yellow camp after that row erupted, some of the women at Yellow would describe you as tourists.

Really?

Yeah, I remember that. And I remember Jenny getting quite upset about that.

This picture, this photo expresses the sort of general feeling - there's me on top.

Fantastic.

And the police, you know they're not looking angry.

No, I...

Gently teasing them and...

So would these have been the Newbury police?

Yeah.

Because it wasn't always just the Newbury police, was it?

No, because the Met came - you know, policing big demos.

Can I take a picture of that, Leah?

Of-course.

And how, how were the Met different?

They were quite fierce.

Yes, they were. There's another one over there. Don't know if you want that or that?

I'll take all of them if I could. That's a great picture. Such good images aren't they. I mean, you just, the time...

That conjures up the feeling, I think.

What is that? Someone there?

It's just a lot of actually quite happy smiling faces!

That's Leah there, alright (laughs) with her....

That feels like the spirit of it.

Yeah.

And you're on the - this is the perimeter gate, is it here?

Yeah.

You're sitting on the, on the gate?

Front gate.

Fantastic. Is that you again?

Think so. Might be.

So what sort of um, influence do you think Greenham had ,on on you going forward once you decided to leave? Do you think it had an influence on the rest of your life?

When I'd leaved?

Yeah.

When I left - I had been a social worker. And I was given a year's unpaid leave to go to Greenham.

Wow.

Caused quite a...

Quite a stir.

Stir here.

In Derby, she was front page news, she was.

But as I - when I lived there quite a long time, I realised I just couldn't go back to being a social worker. It just, it just felt too restrictive - there were things I wouldn't have agreed with. So um when I left I came home for a bit, and I just couldn't bear to be indoors all the time. So I found a sort of low paid job - a group for people who are doing gardening group, a group of young lads - joined in that for a while. And um then I decided I like gardening, so I tried to be a gardener, so I put a little advertisement in the local post office and got one or two clients, and things built from there until I got a proper gardening businesses.

Fantastic.

Which I then did for the next 20 years!

Wow.

It also changed what one's view of oneself. I mean, you, yourself, you said once, when you were sitting by the campfire and there were two women kissing.

Yeah.

And you were a bit taken aback at first. And then you said 'Oh, well, why not?'

Yeah.

And then I think in the end after - it changed it, I think it opened up a range of possibilities. You didn't have to be what you - what people thought you ought to be, you could be ad then, I mean, Leah and I had known each other for quite a while, and then we got together, because all of a sudden, you'd started thinking very differently about sexuality and the range of what, what was possible. So, so then we came here 32/33 years ago. We've been here together since then. You know, because everything just kind of changed. And we did. So...

And once you left the camp was, was it more difficult to, to live with a different sexuality - with a different, you know, in what I think outside of the camp would be seen as an alternative lifestyle?

I think people some people were a bit funny with me.

Were they?

Yes, Leah, they were. I mean, you don't think you were much bothered but...

No.

But several people were a bit funny with me, you know. And people didn't always accept that - well we just we just kept living here and doing our own thing and, you know, so that was how it was. And of-course attitudes have changed enormously, and pair of old women aren't seen as very highly sexual anyway! (Laughs). So what. People can think what they like. And in general, I think young people have got much more open attitudes than a lot of people of my generation and older, for sure.

You can see in this picture, I mean, there we are with the police - the policemen look quite friendly, they're smiling.

They do.

It's not - we're just talking to them.

And would you talk to them about why they were there or...

Why we were there.

Why you were there?

Yeah.

What were their views?

Well, just they listened, I mean, I don't know they expressed strong views but they were... there's some cutting.

Oh yes, a picture on that, that's a fantastic photograph. Could you could you just move your thumb slightly so that I can - for some reason, I've got it in selfie mode, that's no good. It'll be frightening when my face comes up! Brilliant.

That will be in - I think that was part of an arranged day - we will all cut the fence, which we did.

They're fantastic pictures. Absolutely fantastic. I mean what an amazing narrative of you know, how we lived, and how happy you were.

It was great fun, you know.

That's the bicycle - preparing for the bicycle action. Having a meeting about it. And then, that's it - my friend put on that little hat. That's me,

and we went off, she got her little bicycle, and we had to cut the fence first to get in. That's Annie cutting the fence.

There doesn't seem to be any, I mean you'd think that there would be soldiers or something to stop you?

There will be eventually - you'll see! (Laughs). Then we cut the fence, and we go in with our bikes.

You've got a witch's hat on, haven't you?

There we are. We're inside. And he's laughing, you see he's arrested that woman but he's laughing.

Oh let's have a picture of that. Is that - and that's a soldier?

It's a soldier laughing because he's arrested - it was all sort of fun, you know. There you are, she's sort of pretending to shriek and he's just laughing. That's my friend. And there's me.

Oh that's fantastic. That's brilliant.

'Course in the end, they confiscated the bikes and you had to go around to the base to ask to have your bike back. Yeah. All good fun!

Yeah, that is, that does - I mean, I think um, the artistic creativity as well - the banners, the songs, the sketches.

We we have got a banner up in the loft - it was Derby Women for Peace that was made, and it maybe ought to go on display somewhere, Leah.

Where?

You know the banner - in the loft.

Where are you going to display it?

I don't know, maybe somebody would like it - to put in a museum or something?

Well the, so the narratives and the pictures, and any artefacts we get given - because people have given us bits and pieces, they're going to go to London School of Economics archives.

Really?

Yeah.

That's interesting.

So it would it, would it be worth them having that Leah, or looking at it?

You're not going up there?

Well, I might after lunch.

Oh, you could, you could lend it and they could give it back to you.

That's true.

You know, you don't have to - and you don't have to decide now, I could come back, it only takes me an hour to get up here.

Where are you coming from?

In Leamington.

Oh, not too far away - Leamington Spa.

So, you know, have a think about it. The, the exhibition's, it's going be twenty exhibitions around the country - pop up exhibitions, and there's going to be a permanent archive at LSE.

Because it's a pity for it not to be seen again.

Yeah, yeah.

But it could - I mean, if you wanted to you could loan it for, because there'll obviously be a bigger exhibition in London because everything is bigger in London, isn't it. And we, you know, I can bring it back if you decide, or you can say, you know, have it for the archives, you know, on the understanding we can have it back because um, Leah's daughters might...

It's not, it's not Leah's - no, it's none of them. It wasn't anything to do with them. I was in Derby Women for Peace. Leah was at Greenham. Derby Women for Peace was an organisation that um, that we, we were there - we did actions locally, and we also supported the Greenham women's peace camp. And it was we who embroidered the panels for the, for them. Some of those people are no longer with us, and I don't know where some of them are. But but it's in our house. There's about two women I know who, still know, who might be interested - not interested in having it, but interested to know what might happen to it, in which case we can contact, contact them. But it seems a pity for it to just be sitting up in our loft.

Yeah.

And to be honest, you know, how much longer are we going to be here, at our sort of ages. That's another thing.

Well, think about it. I mean, you know, it can be today or it can be another day - however you want to arrange.

Okay, well...

I mean, you can contact those women and say what do you think? Or you know, whatever you want to do.

Yeah. What I can do is bring it down, show it to you. You can decide what you want, then I can contact Gwen - Barbs, some of those women are not alive anymore. Anyway, we don't know where Jude is. I know I can contact Sue Hodgkinson. There's about three women I can contact. And that's it. And others...

I don't know what happened to all those women. Because there seemed to be quite a lot of women for peace organisations around the country. And I don't, I don't hear about that...

Don't you?

I think it's all gone really, I think people - young people moved on to things like environmental protest, and street protests, you know, along by Newbury and things like that. Um, and I think once the missiles had moved off the base, and it was the end of the Cold War, I think it was felt that, you know, that Greenham had done its job. I mean, there's always there's always - but there, I think there are still women -are the still women at Menwith Hill? There might be.

Don't know.

They've been there for a long time. So that, that kind of fizzled out. And a lot of women, their lives opened up and they went on to do very different things. And um, yeah. as we did.

And what did you do after you - when did you when did you stop visiting, Diana?

Just not long before the camp finished. After - once Leah had finished being there. And we might have gone once or twice again, I think Leah, but we were involved in protests more locally. Yeah, like the NFL Capenhurst because there was a thought that, that the streams, the watercourses over there were being polluted by what was being leached out from from the NFL Capenhurst - it was a kind of nuclear place. And

we did a couple of actions there which landed us in prison - along with our 75 year old veteran friend Margaret and her husband who was a retired priest, in-fact, a canon of Derby Cathedral! And he was busy, he was busy doing his bit for peace, dressed in his black clerical garments and, um, and we heard the police saying don't take the canon. He was very miffed. But you can imagine what it would have looked like for the police to have arrested an elderly churchmen.

Yes. But not his elderly wife?

No, no, that was different. But hey. So yeah, so we did those things then. And we went to prison.

And it led to one series - that's my friend and she's spray paint, spray painting that thing. And then the police come along looking quite friendly. There she is sitting there. And then he's taking his hat off to her, he's asking her and says he's going to arrest her. This is my...and then they take her away.

Yes, it's all very - you know it's not how you imagine - you imagine things to be a bit more of a scuffle. And I don't know.

No, it wasn't like that.

So do you want a photocopy of that?

Oh, god that would be great.

I've got a thingy upstairs.

Technology is great when it works.

So when's this exhibition?

Well, we don't know yet. We've got to we - don't know where they're going to be. But we want to make sure that the exhibitions go out of

London, so that um, there's, you know, so that, that because actually, a lot of the women are, you know, elsewhere. They're not in London, so we want women to be able to go and see it, and we also want - you know, we want members of the public to understand you know, what went on and how it was, and what the women did. And because I don't, I don't - I mean, I've learned so much over the last 3 weeks speaking to women, particularly about, about how - you know there's a Margaret Atwood quote that says you know, 'Men are afraid women will laugh at them, and women are afraid men will kill them.' And, er, and I think it's just that, that mocking that you were talking about that just really comes out really, really strongly, and the creative ways that women used very, um, you know, female, like the web that you had, you know, the wool that you would pass between you, the blockades and so on.

Absolutely.

You know the men wouldn't do that.

No, no, that's why we didn't want men there. You know, they wanted come to Green Gate for example. They could come and visit, but we didn't want any men living there. They weren't creative in that way. They would know how to do something, we learnt in our own way how to do something.

Yeah. Did you, um, were there things that you had to learn how to do in terms of, you know, surviving was - was there, I don't know, things like fixing cars or, you know...

There was usually a woman who knew how to do something, you know, there were all sorts of talents among them, yes. No I was thinking about if you want to get in the base, we just sort of did it - but a man would 'You do it like this' - spend hours doing it properly. And we didn't want that sort of thing.

Yes, properly in inverted commas, because properly is just getting in, isn't it?

Yes, yes. I wouldn't mind lending this if it would be useful.

Um, are you sure?

Yes. As long as I get it back.

Yeah, no, absolutely. It's um - they are fantastic those pictures. That one of you dressed as a witch is just so great.

Yes, it gives you an idea of the sort of humour. That's when we went to Salisbury Plain...

Was this a sort of Greenham outing where you walked across the ...

We went across Salisbury Plain to the - what do you call them? Yes, and there's the police trying to stop us. There we are, Stonehenge. Yes.

Fantastic.

We spent the night at Stonehenge. Yeah.

God you couldn't - you can't get anywhere near Stonehenge these days, can you?

I know, I know. We just slept by the stones, you see. Yeah.

And was this...

That's back at Greenham, that's a bender.

Is this where you lived?

No, that's not my bender, its somebody else's.

It does look very um, tranquil, actually very.

Yes, very.

And did you all - did you have sort of space around all of them, or were some people together?

No, there was a little bit of space around - that one's particularly in a big space, I think.

Is that a soldier?

No, that's a woman - I don't know what she's doing. I don't know quite what I'm doing there.

(Laughs).

Seem to be - I don't know. That's my tent. That's me in the bender.

That's for you, Sarah.

Oh, lovely, thank you. Fantastic. Ooh!

She's having a mad moment! (The cat, I think!)

She's lovely.

Did you go up in the loft?

No, no I've just - no I had these in my...

Ah, fantastic - you see it's things like this that I find so brilliant, there's so - and I get the impression each gate had their own sort of, you know the kind of art that they had.

They had their own character.

Yes, character that's, that's the word. Interesting to see they're saying here they want commitments for women to come to Greenham for 2 days midweek, during, during the year. Was it was quite difficult at times - did they not have enough people to...

It wasn't what that was about.

To support.

There's that as well. If you think that's worth having, I can photocopy that. I remember signing that.

Fantastic. It's amazing, all this stuff. How much how much is, has been kept. And I've heard that some woman have wanted to years ago, have wanted - had archives of stuff that they wanted to give to museums, and nobody would take it. They just, they just threw it away. You know, because they were moving and moving. So yeah, just absolute, absolute criminal that people didn't take it. I'd love to have a photocopy of that. That would be great. Thank you.

You see that this is, these are just newspaper cuttings. You've probably seen these.

So why, Leah, were you on the front page of the local newspaper - because you got a year off to go to Greenham?

A lot of people protested about this because they didn't like the idea.

In Derbyshire, Derby and Derbyshire were then a unitary authority. Authority altogether. And the leader of Derbyshire county council was one David Bookbinder, who was quite socialist and Labour. I think it's no, it's probably relevant, probably relevant that he was also Jewish. Um. Because there were rumblings and things. And he, he and his council, they agreed for Leah to have this one year's leave of absence unpaid.

Unpaid, yes.

So I mean, having agreed that with her team leader, you know, and everything, but there were people who were Tories who, on the council thought it was outrageous that this should happen that the council should be so...

Yeah, I got this anonymous letter saying...

Did you?

Greenham is hijacked by lesbians.

(Laughs).

Well!

There were a few - there were a few there, yep. Um. Whether it was hijacked is another question, and sometimes, I mean, if you're a married woman with children, you couldn't really go and live there. What you could do was support or be part of it. Do you remember the food runs that people used to do.

Yes, yes.

Or go there at the weekend you know? So, you know people's circumstances were such if you were single, either single straight or single and lesbian, you had the time to go there, you haven't got necessarily got the commitments which meant that you had to stay at home. Or like Leah her children were gone...

I was lucky in that way, had it been a few years earlier, I felt I couldn't have gone because I had children.

So when, when you went Diana, and your daughter was 12.

Yeah.

And you were er, taking part in you know, breaking into the base and so on. What was your decision making around what would happen if you got arrested?

Well, Sarah was being looked - she's a Sarah too, she was being looked after by other people in the Green Gate. There was an occasion when she came in with me when she was about 12. And, um, you know, we were sitting down on the runway, and then the police came along with alsatians, and, and Sarah went up to them and started stroking this police Alsatian 'Nice doggy, nice doggy'. (Laughs). And um, we were sort of cautioned and let out. When it came to when I actually did go to prison, I mean, there was a time at which earlier, I'd said to my daughter, she was about 13, 'Sarah, how would you feel if I refused to pay my fine, and chose to go to prison?' She said 'Oh, Mummy, I don't think I'd like you to do that.' And so I respected that and thought, well, you know, what's the point of doing this if it's going to make a child unhappy? So anyway, er, on another occasion when once we were here, the three of us living here, I did take part in an action - Sarah was on that action as well, she got cautioned and fingerprinted. And they were not, they were often quite fierce when they were fingerprinting you, weren't they, Leah. They just grabbed your hands and jabbed them down onto the ink. It didn't have to be like that, but it was. And I think there came a point when she said to me 'It's alright, Mummy. You go, you go to prison, I'll go and stay with Vicky,' - one of her school friends. And her parents fortunately, were quite liberal. And so Sarah went to stay with them for a week. And I got a leave of absence from work because I was working for a justice and peace organisation called The Fellowship of Reconciliation, and they were fine about it. So I just cleared my diary, went, went to court, um, with my six books and my stuff and was er, sent down.

And did you, did you defend yourself?

Yeah, yeah. We did defend ourselves. We did defend ourselves. Yes.

And what was the defence that you used?

I think the defence, I think, was that the nuclear weapons were immoral. And that as a responsible citizen, it behoved me to take a stand against them. And um, I wasn't somebody who likely broke the law. You know, you're brought up to think policemen are okay. And they're there to, you know, help you and all the rest of it. And then you saw a different side of policing, and a different side of lawmaking. Um. So, I suppose that was fundamentally it. You know, that, that you, I think we felt we were in some way occupying the moral high ground on this subject. And that it was right for us to do that. And this country's had a long tradition of, of non-violent protests - Quakers have a long history of it. And of course, there were a lot of Quakers there.

So do, was religion important to the camp or at Green Gate?

No.

Not especially. I mean, there were individual people. I mean, I would call myself a Christian, but perhaps a rather more unconventional kind. And for me, how can you, how can you be a Christian and have weapons of mass destruction? It just doesn't hang together. In-fact, it's wicked. Um. So I, and I was in the dock with - on one occasion with a priest and a nun, and I didn't think that that was particularly bad company, on that occasion.

So a priest and a nun from Greenham? Had been protesting at Greenham?

No, they hadn't, no this was as a result of taking place in the Ash Wednesday protests - Christian CND, and other like minded organisations, we gathered outside the MOD on Ash Wednesday, in order to write, we had ash - little bags of ash, and we were putting crosses made of ash on the walls of the MOD, because what happens in

churches on Ash Wednesday, um, is that people would go up to the, to the front, to the altar and they would have a cross of ash put on their foreheads. And that's about remembering your mortality, and all the rest of it. And so ash crosses on Ash Wednesday was significant for Christians. And, um, yeah, we got arrested for doing that. And we got charged with marking the walls of a building without the owner's consent. And of-course, our defence in court was well as taxpayers we are the owners collectively of the building. (Laughs). But they didn't go for that one. (Laughs).

(Laughs). Yes, it does sound like if they arrested you and charged you with something, that they'd already decided that that was going to happen?

Oh yeah. Yeah. And the Oxford intellectuals, of-course, had written a biblical text all along one of the long walls of the MOD, in coloured chalk. They managed to do that in the time was really quite splendid. Yeah. And, yeah. So protests happened from various different people - from very Christian, to no religion, to new age, to whatever, you know. And we were all in it together really.

And did you get a lot of support from CND at Greenham?

Did you, Leah?

I don't know. I can't answer that.

I don't know.

Because I don't think they were, they were particularly interested when the march happened. I think they thought that that was, you know, it wasn't really going to be anything and they weren't particularly interested, but as it got bigger. I don't know whether...

I never felt, I mean, obviously there would have been women from CND who came to Greenham.

Yeah.

But CND as an official presence I never saw.

No.

And how much, how much do you think class was an issue? I mean, you talked a little bit about class in terms of the difference between the soldiers and...

There was a Blue Gate, there were more working class women there, weren't there?

I think so.

That was an obvious difference. But um, did it make a difference?

I think probably the women who could best answer that were working class women. Because I think it's like, if you're black, you notice racism a lot more than if you're white, do you know what I mean? Because Sue Hodgkinson could answer that question Leah, because she was at Blue.

I can't hear.

Sue Hodgkinson could answer that question, because she was at Blue

Yes, yeah.

She then went on to train as a solicitor.

Do you think Greenham influenced her decision to do that?

I think it was part of it.

I think for some working class women, Greenham was a complete escape and freedom that they hadn't known before. That showed up at the money meetings, for example.

But it was for you too, Leah.

Sorry?

It was a complete escape and a freedom for you too.

In another way.

In another way.

Yes. Yeah.

So how was it, how did it liberate you two, do you think?

It just, just opened up a whole new world for me - things as you say, lesbianism and, just, just made me feel free. Yeah.

Yeah. And I think it made made me feel freer in that respect, that that was, you know that a lot of conventional thinking, and training trains you for, for, for heterosexual norms, and that those will suit many people very well. But then I was gradually realised it didn't suit me at all. And also I think, the very different way of thinking about religion, and very different way of regarding the law - as something which might, on occasion, be used by people with power against those without power, rather than as a you know, just as a taken - it's not a taken for granted thing. It could reinforce existing power imbalances between people, and that the courts you know, did the bidding. I mean, because you once said that the magistrates could choose, but they didn't.

Yes, I did, that's right. That was in Derby.

Oh, yes.

She said 'I have no alternative to send you to prison.' I said 'You have an alternative, but you're not taking it.' Yeah, in the courts we were frequently...

Describe Newbury court.

...taken there - we could go in with our knitting and sit there.

That time I was up before the beak in Newbury, there were women putting their booted feet up on the desk in front of them, and things like that, and you know, was quite scary. But it was very exhilarating.

Yeah, exhilarating sounds like - a lot of photographs look exhilarating.

Yeah, yes. Free and I don't know.

Made you realise there was there was another way of living other than the traditional and conventional one.

Yeah, and those heterosexual norms that you were talking about, I think are also um, connected, or heavily overlapping with that - certainly in the '80s - of the patriarchal norms.

Yes. And, and I see with great sadness that it's all there again.

In what respect?

Well, I think a huge pressure on young women to conform to certain ways of looking, and certain ways of being, you know, in their bodies and all the rest of it. And, and with social media being used to reinforce those, those norms mean when you think that girls have to go to school wearing makeup, and things like that. It probably takes ages in the morning to do that, we have - someone we know - her daughter has to do that. She can't go to her FE College without being fully made up, so she has to get up an hour earlier in the morning. So...

So in terms um, of the legacy of Greenham, if we're talking about girls now, what would you like them to, to understand in terms of a legacy from, from um, the peace camp and the protest? Because we're going to try and put modules for secondary schools.

Are you?

Yeah. From there.

Oh goodness.

No pressure! (Laughs).

No pressure! Just goodness, I suppose I would say it's alright if you're uncomfortable with the way your life is, if you're uncomfortable with the way the grain goes, just go against the grain. (Coughs). Sorry. And there's, there are whole realms of possibilities out there, that are way beyond having to look like a model out of Vogue, or whatever. There's a whole - and if you want to do that, that's fine - but I think just to think, and not - think for yourself, be yourself. And, yeah, don't, you don't have to conform, if you don't want it.

What about you Leah, what do you think?

Yes, I agree with that. Yes. That's right.

I think what I definitely get from you in terms of legacy is that, that liberated, free - which is kind of the same thing, isn't it?

Yeah.

Just having - give yourself permission.

Yeah.

You can you can think outside the box. I think it did give you permission to think outside the box, and the possibilities, and the tools were there to do that. And sometimes it made for some very uncomfortable conversations, but you know that, that's fine. And that was good.

(Edit in recording).

I'll photocopy this.

That's a picture of me building a little garden, which we called the Life Garden, my friend and I. And it was there for a while. And then one day, we found all the stones in it had been kicked around. And this went on, we got back and then it went on, they'd kicked it round. And then one day I decided I'd wait, wait hiding to see what happens. So I waited an hour or 2, and then this man came along and kicked all the stones out, marched off again. So then I thought well I've got to confront him about this - so the next day I sat on the edge of the garden and waited. Just sort of sat there, and he eventually came and kicked the stones around, and I said 'Why are we kicking our stones around out of our garden?' And he said 'All you women, you're filthy, make a great mess of the place', and went on like that, and I pointed out the base was a mess in itself. And he stormed off, and then the next time I waited, and he came by, and I just sat there and he just lifted the stones out and gently put them one by one on the side, and went off again. And then I was going to come home for a bit. So I wrote him a note saying 'I will be away for a few days and I won't be able to look after the garden.' When I came back, he hadn't touched it.

Fantastic.

I've written it all down here, if you want the story?

Fantastic.

Don't read it all now. You can borrow that.

Borrow or photocopy. Shall I get some lunch on the go?

Yeah, that'd be great.

I've got sort of soup and samosas and cheese and...

Perfect. That sounds wonderful. Oh, thank you, Diana. You're going to be up and down those stairs photocopying stuff!

It's good for me to keep going.

Yes, that felt like quite an achievement.

Oh, yeah. Do you think he was a local resident?

Yeah. He was a local resident, yes.

And how were, generally how did the local residents feel about you, do you think?

Some of them were very against us. Yeah. I remember a woman who lived outside Newbury and she was quite hostile.

In what respect?

I wrote her a poem. Where did I put it? It's not very long.

So what did she used to do?

She just sort of shouted at us and looked angry. She didn't actually do anything. She'd come out and shout.

And did you get any response from this?

No, I didn't get any response from her. They were quite - people were generally a bit hostile in Newbury, in the town, you know they would

shun us. But the Quakers were really brilliant. Yeah, they were wonderful.

Local people?

Local.

Right.

And there were local residents who would offer us a bath, or wash or clothes and so on, so there were some very good ones, but generally in the town it felt hostile. Yeah.

And what why do you think that was?

Why? It's just like this man, the whole idea, you know there are these women, dirty old women messing up the place. (Laughs). Not seeing beyond that.

And were a lot of people, local residents, employed at the base? Do you think that was part of it?

May have been - I'm not sure about that.

Yeah, I think um, it's, I think the - what again, one of the things that has surprised me is the sort of generosity of women towards people who've shown them hostility. So for instance, you writing that poem, and writing a note to that man...

I was quite frightened the second night, when I just sat there all alone waiting for him to come - it for quite frightening.

Because you didn't know if he was going to be violent?

I just thought it you know - I didn't think he was going to do anything to me personally. He was coming and he's going to kick it all around a bit.

Yeah, those are, those are really great stories. Really great.

I feel, I was proud of that. Because it worked.

Yeah. Yeah. Those are, I mean, I think that type of um, I don't know, response to, to hostilities is something that we could do with more of in our society.

Yes, you felt very strong when you did respond in that way - whether it was to the police or anybody else. Yes, it felt very strong. Not like the woman who slashed the tyres of the police car, we didn't like that. It was just the wrong attitude.

Yeah. And I think for, for a lot of people, that's an attitude that you'd have to kind of learn to, to get into. That's not how people tend to respond.

Yeah, that's right.

And had you been, were you religious before you...

No, I wasn't religious. I was brought up in the conventional Christian background, but I sort of discovered in my late teens, and um later on, I turn to Buddhism.

Are you still a Buddhist?

Yeah.

And um, so what do your grandchildren and children remember about about you at that...

Well only Rita, the one who contacted you remembers, she was, as I said, she was born in 1981, 2,3,4. She was only about four. That's right. And she came to Greenham, I took her there on several occasions and

she remembers that because she slept in the bender. And what she remembers is that there was going to be an eviction, and I saved her baked beans by putting it in a tree!

(Edit in recording).

I think Leah, you said to me at the time, that you felt that some of the women there were police women. Um, and one of...

Oh, at the beginning?

Yes.

Who pretended to be, yes, that's right. They came and sat around the fire. You could just tell they weren't Greenham women, I think their hair was different or something. They just didn't have act in a Greenham way. That's right.

And they had smart jeans on. But none of us did smart at Greenham!

We could see through it. We saw once they were - they were trying to hear what we were talking about the meeting.

That's all it was really.

No, that's great. And I think so a couple of the women that I've interviewed have said, I've said 'Oh, you know, do you think you got any infiltration?' They said 'Oh, yeah, I'm sure they would have sent women to try. ' But they said 'You know, you're either a Greenham woman or you weren't, and they would have been found out really, really quickly,' so that basically...

They were!

(Laughs). Yes.

It's true. They were! (Laughs).