

**Review Stephanie Davies, OTHER GIRLS LIKE ME, (Bedazzled Ink 2020)**  
Blanche Wiesen Cook

During this worrisome time of grief and mourning, environmental tragedy and pandemic, the human family remains threatened by 15,000 nuclear warheads. Yet across our world there is protest and hope. 75 years ago, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed (6, 9 August 1945). Also, 75 years ago the UN charter was signed and the United Nations was established (26 June 1945). Forty years ago, on 9 September 1980 the Plowshares Eight, a delegation of activists against nuclear weapons, radioactive waste, and warfare entered the General Electric plant in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania,. Led by nuns and former Catholic priest Philip Berrigan, they "poured blood over two nuclear weapons' nose cones," hammered the metal, and proclaimed: "We come to GE to beat swords into plowshares and to expose the criminality of nuclear weapons and corporate piracy.... GE is helping the Pentagon prepare for atomic holocaust." Their action generated similar protests around the world.

[see Frida Berrigan, daughter of Philip Berrigan and Elizabeth McAlister -- arrested again in 2018 for Plowshare actions against Trident submarine missiles based in Georgia -- "After 4 Decades of Plowshares Actions, It's Nuclear Warfare that Should Be on Trial -- Not Activists," Waging Nonviolence, [COMMONDREAMS.ORG](https://www.commondreams.org), 27 September 2020]

The next year, the UN designated 21 September the International day of Peace to bolster the movement for global nuclear disarmament, and end the threat of war. Ironically, 1981 was also the year NATO agreed to base US nuclear missiles on peaceful British soil. When Greenham Common was rendered a military airfield scores of "Women for Life on Earth" marched 100 miles from Cardiff to the military base and established an encampment. On 5 September 1981, four women -- in honor of the suffragettes -- chained themselves to the fence; others presented the US base commander with a letter to protest nuclear weapons. He said they could remain.

Greenham Common ultimately involved thousands of women committed to disruptive action for healing transformation. They Imagined a world of peace, freedom, "fruitful work and thoughtful play," dignity, joy, love. They confronted soldiers sent to protect 90 US nuclear cruise missiles, with resistance -- songs and poems of opposition, an enduring movement that became global and historic. Twelve years of encampment, the empowerment of women and incessant protests followed. Since the world still embraces nuclear weapons, continues to court disaster, and is now confronting multiple catastrophes, the legacy of Greenham Common demands attention as we struggle to imagine a future of global resistance on the road to dignity and security for all humanity.

Fortunately, Stephanie Davies has gifted us with a memoir that details life at Greenham Common, and its lasting impact. She participated in the campaign's first major event on 12 December 1982, the anniversary of NATO's decision to place US missiles across Europe, when 35,000 women arrived to "Embrace the Base." By 1983 hundreds of women lived at the camp, and Stephanie decided to join the community in 1984. She lived there for over ten months, as protests escalated -- fences were cut, "fanciful" tactics were deployed,

women were arrested, mass evictions began. The details are stirring, occasionally painful, frequently delightful -- as is the story of her life, before and after Greenham.

Born in a small English seaside village, St Mary Bourne, daughter of her school's most progressive headmaster, Stephanie Davis is surrounded by profound learning, "a childhood filled with wonders," and political activism. Her father was her hero, and she "loved riding to school on the back" of his motorbike. "A proud socialist," her father was called "the Red Head" because his school was the first in the country to accept all children, regardless of wealth or academic status. He believed everyone deserved an excellent education, and his school offered "mixed ability classes," with all subjects available to boys and girls.

There were, however, limits. Stephanie loved to play football with her brother. But her father refused to support a girls team, and limited the school's sports trips to boys. It was her first awakening. He believed girls were unfit for sports, or an independent active life. She was determined to prove him wrong. But the process was slow. Despite her growing independence and discontent, Stephanie was locked into an abusive relationship with a controlling "boyfriend" Martin which lasted from the time she was 16 until after she graduated Bath University -- where she played hockey, excelled in her studies of French and Russian, and became a notable activist against apartheid in South Africa. Stephanie's slow journey toward personal liberation is filled with surprises and the kind of lyric detail that evokes the spirit of Edna O'Brien. One is enchanted -- or repelled -- by all who appear.

Finally, real change happened. Stephanie heard an appeal on the radio for more women to arrive at Greenham Common -- at a time of fierce opposition. She had demonstrated with them twice -- as a member of Bath's peace group, once with her mother who was a member of WILPF. Faced with eviction, the appeal was powerful: "We need to show the authorities we represent thousands of women who oppose war. They can't get rid of us. We will not be intimidated." It was time to return, and embrace an entirely new life.

Stephanie's time at Greenham was a journey of commitment and discovery. She could love women; she could end her six year ordeal with Martin; she could be independent, bold, happy. Her biggest surprise, was the freedom to love that defined all the Greenham campsites. Despite abundant media attention, there had been no mention of "the lesbians, the strong sexy women who walked upright and fixed things... and kissed each other on the lips." The media "focused on mothers and grandmothers and wives" there "to save the world and create a better future for their children." Of course many wives, mothers, grandmothers were there. "But they were also sisters and daughters and friends -- and lovers." And she was now part of a thrilling new community -- defined in part by the lyrics of her favorite punk rock song "Other Girls Like Me:" ""Don't wanna wear your heels/ Don't wanna cook your meals/ Don't wanna sit on the sidelines/

Just want to run, run, run like the boys/ Just stop playing with your war toys/ ....  
I'm all right now [surrounded by] other girls like me...."

Much of the book concerns Stephanie's many romances and moments of ecstasy; adventures and side-trips -- most notably to the ancient site of Stonehenge for a full moon ceremony, described in vivid magical tones. There were many acts of civil disobedience -- which involved danger, courage, and foolhardy errors -- including an accidental invasion of Aldermaston -- Britain's primary nuclear research facility, where Steph and four friends feared they were irradiated by plutonium and uranium. The 12 June 1984 event Aldermaston resulted in arrest, significant publicity, a major court trial, new alliances, radiation testing. Stephanie's research for the trial led her to Trevor Brown, a whistleblower fired from Aldermaston who objected to its secrecy policies which trumped safety precautions. He explained: "Our workers were getting exposed to plutonium in the same way [uranium] miners in Namibia were getting exposed." Namibia sent the uranium for enrichment to Aldermaston, which made it into plutonium. Finally, nuclear bombs were made at Aldermaston, which were then tested in Nevada." Clearly, the future of life depends on activism, the ongoing struggle for truth and peace.

Forever an activist, personal tragedy altered Stephanie's relationship with her new community. Her father arrived at the camp one day to tell her he was unwell. Actually he had a brain tumor. Tensions with her negative mother, who criticized all her friends and everything she wore, needed to be adjusted. She loved and admired her father, he was not the patriarchy; however limited, he was still in part her hero. Despite her disappointments, he was an anti-war socialist visionary who "railed against Margaret Thatcher" and introduced his daughter to Angela Davis, Che Guevara, Malcolm X, the Beatles, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. Love triumphed and further changes were made. Decades of mourning, were healed by new work, new commitments, major moves. His death caused Steph to embark upon a new journey of "kindness" rooted in "a love for all humanity." Now in New York, married to Bea the woman she loves who shares her values, Stephanie Davies works for Doctors Without Borders.

They visited Greenham recently. Now an historic site, no longer a military base, but "open common land bustling with birdsong and wildlife," surrounded by memory. The cruise missiles were removed decades ago, but the threat of nuclear disaster persists. In January 2020 the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock 20 seconds closer to midnight. Now 100 seconds to midnight, closer than ever -- because devastation is possible in a time of media silence and growing public ignorance. Democratic movements, global marches of "public love" inspired by Plowshare activists and the women of Greenham Common remain humanity's hope.

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