The Greens (WA)

30th Anniversary History Project

[*1990-2020*]

An interview with:

Dr MARILYN PALMER

30th May 2020 at Joan Jenkins' home in Bunbury

The Greens (WA) acknowledge that First Nations peoples, as the original inhabitants of this country, have a special cultural and spiritual connection with the land and water. We believe that their rights and responsibilities as owners and custodians must be respected.
We hold that First Nations peoples have a right to self-determination and political representation, and must be partners in the development and implementation of public policies, programs and services that affect them.
This interview was recorded on Noongar land and the Greens (WA) acknowledge that these lands were stolen and sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

INTERVIEWER
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NOTES TO READERS
FULL CAPITALS in the text indicate a word or words emphasised by the interviewee.

Square brackets [ ] are used for insertions not in the original recording.

INTERVIEW DISCLAIMER
This is a near verbatim interview, meaning that the transcript follows natural speech patterns. Readers should be aware that how we speak may differ greatly from how we would write and that the evolution of everyday language and speech patterns also provides valuable insight into the culture and history of a place.

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INTRODUCTION

Dr Marilyn Palmer was born in Perth in 1954. After graduating with a Bachelor of Applied Science from Curtin University in 1978 she moved to Bunbury to work.

Marilyn was active in the Jo Vallentine Peace Group in the 1980s and was an early member of the Green Development organisation- two of the founding groups of The Greens (WA).

Marilyn is an academic at ECU's Bunbury campus and remains an active Greens' member in the South West, having stood as a lower house candidate in 1993 and 2001.

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TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:09] DW: Well, I'm with Marilyn Palmer in Bunbury on Saturday the 30th of May. Marilyn, welcome. Thanks for giving up your time and talking about your life with the Greens. Can I just start with you? So where were you born?

PALMER: OK, so I was born in St Ives Maternity Hospital in Victoria Park [WA] in 1954.

DW: Fantastic. And did you have other siblings in your family?

PALMER: Yeah, I was the youngest of three. So I have a sister seven years older than me and a brother who's four years older than me. So I was the youngest.

DW: And your parents, were they both working in '54?

PALMER: OK yeah, they would have been. My dad had a trucking business, but my mum would have been home-based.

DW: Right. And can you remember what primary school you went to?

PALMER: I went to a few primary schools, so my first primary school... my parents moved when I was four. They moved to Dunsborough and built what was the Dunsborough shop .... it was the only shop in old Dunsborough called Palmer's Store. And they built that and that's why I started my primary school years in Quinadlup primary school. And then they decided that Dunsborough wasn't going anywhere. So they..

DW: Wrong move!

PALMER: That's the real estate story. We moved to Perth and then I went to Lathlain Park primary school. And then I went to Cannington Primary School when my parents moved to Cannington, so we had always, they had always lived in the southern suburbs [of Perth].

DW: So a mixture of Dunsborough, a lovely environment by the sea and then back in the inner city, Perth and in those days, Cannington and Lathlain Park would have still been reasonably undeveloped, I would've thought?

PALMER: Yes, Lathlain Park was very suburban but Cannington by the time we were at Cannington, that was that was still semi-rural, at least parts of it a little bit further south was semi-rural.

DW: Yeah. I may have gone to the same primary school, I think, on where Carousel is now.

PALMER: Yes!

DW: Yes. And I had to walk through the the dairy to get there.

PALMER: Yes, that's it.

DW: Very different these days.

PALMER: Yes.

DW: And in terms of your high school, what high school did you go to?

PALMER: I went to Cannington High School. So we stopped moving at that point. And so I was at Cannington High School the whole time.

DW: And do you have any memories of those days, either primary school, down at Dunsborough or Cannington, semi-rural, that attracted you to your views about the environment, and your views you have now as an adult?

PALMER: I hadn't really thought about that, but I would say probably, particularly Dunsborough, because it was such a free and easy life and a lot of time spent as kids, you know, we go off to places as a group of kids and being able to swim and we had a little boat and all that sort of stuff so a lot of freedom, but not necessarily, I don't think particularly, certainly not a sense that nature was completely separate from us.

But my Dad's background was a farming background, we spent a lot of time with his sister at his sister's farm. So certainly we had a lot of connection to the outdoors, but not particularly knowledgeable about the natural world.

DW: Right. And did that come through any of your high school subjects? What sort of subjects were you interested in?

PALMER: No, not particularly. Very much social sciences. So I that's really was what my leaning was, was into economics, geography, a much stronger social science background.

DW: And did you have dreams at high school going on to university, studying economics or some of those social sciences?

PALMER: Yeah, I was first in the family, but certainly I had assumed that I would go to university. I mean, those days, lots of students left school at year 10 and so if you stayed on then then university was the likely path.

DW: I think there were those Commonwealth scholarships and ...

PALMER: Yes there was teacher's bursaries and Commonwealth scholarships. So I had a teacher's bursary to go to teachers college from year 10 and then.... but I got a scholarship as part of the American Field Service Exchange Program[1]. So after I finished my leaving and matric, I took that up the following year and spent 12 months in the United States to do another final year of high school.

DW: Well, that would have been exciting in terms of different environments and cultures.

PALMER: Yes, yes.

DW: Whereabouts in America did you do that?

PALMER: So I was in San Diego. Yes.

DW: Another beautiful seaside location.

[1] See https://afs.org/#afs-nav-what-we-do

PALMER: Yes, it was.

DW: And did you think about staying on? Or, you couldn't stay on, you had to come back?

[00:04:52] **PALMER**: Yes. But I guess this is part of that social change that was happening at the time. I got a Commonwealth scholarship at the end of year 12 to go to university and my parents were adamant that I wasn't going to university because they saw that as being a kind of like.... just not what we did. They were happy for me to go to teacher's college, but they saw university as a kind of a hotbed of radicalism.

DW: Wow - because of [opposition to] the Vietnam War?

PALMER: And we're actively opposed to that. Yes, I think it was that. They would have been aware that university students were at the forefront of some of those issues and they were really unhappy. But then I went on the AFS scholarship and was away anyway. So I started I started teacher's college, realized that that was just awful, didn't want to do that. Then I was going away in the middle of the year because with the Northern Hemisphere... so I was a bit older for going on an overseas exchange program, but I would have been really immature and not ready to have gone the year before anyway. And the US system kids were older in high school anyway, so I wasn't kind of out of sync there when I got there.

So I had that six months from when I finished my leaving and matric... went to teacher's college, found out it was terrible, worked for six months, went to the US for 12 months, came back, by that stage my parents had kind of accepted that I would probably go to uni and then I had no more resistance to to me going to university. But that was an interesting time when they - from their perspective - thought university was not something that was a good idea. And also they saw that I would probably just get married and have kids and therefore it wasn't necessary.

DW: Yes. But I think universities, that's a big change now, universities in those days were seen as, you know, for the privileged to go to and have a professional career. Rather than for everyone perhaps to go to and have an arts degree or whatever.

PALMER: Yes. So I think it probably was a certain amount of kind of fear of the unknown because my parents were very generous and loving and supportive. So I think it was for them it was the fear of the unknown.

DW: Oh okay. And did you live at home when you went to uni?

PALMER: I did. I lived at home for the first two years because I could commute to uni easily. I was at Curtin University doing social work.

DW: And they were in Cannington?

PALMER: Yes, that was an easy commute, but I think quite a lovely story that does say something about them was that they.... when I turned 21 because, you know, this was a free university - Whitlam[2] - and I could get an independent allowance after I'd done enough part time work in those years to qualify for an independent allowance. And so now that by the time I turned 21, I was heading into third year at uni. I decided just almost

[2] ALP Prime Minister Gough Whitlam abolished university fees for Australians in January 1974. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertiary_education_fees_in_Australia

overnight, really, that it was time for me to leave home. And they were really devastated by that and say, 'No, you know, we really want you to stay at home until you finish university.'

But I was moving out with a friend and honestly, bless their hearts, within about six weeks of me moving out from home, they sold up and moved to Albany, which was closer to where my older sister was living on a farm. And the oldest grandchildren were boarding at high school in Albany. So they just went to where they wanted to be, which was near their other family. So they were so generous to be saying to me, 'No, no, no, you can stay home.'

DW: Were you aware that they were making that sacrifice by staying in Cannington while you…?

PALMER: No, not really. No. But I certainly realised when they sold up and left that that's where they wanted to be.

DW: Sending you postcards from Albany!

PALMER: Yes that's right!

DW: And did university radicalise you and make you more aware of the world and politics?

PALMER: I think it did, yes. Definitely doing social work does. I mean, we had.... so Betsie Buchanan, who's still a stalwart of welfare rights in Western Australia, her husband, Dave Buchanan, was one of our lecturers. I mean, social work sits across those real personal political - individual structural divides. And so in social work you can get channelled into a sort of psychotherapeutic kind of approach, to a more politicised approach around community work and policy and social change.

I kind of hovered around, but it was by this stage, it was the early 1980s. Neoliberalism hadn't hit. This was the optimistic time, the Vietnam War we were all out of that, by the late '70s. I finished uni in 1978, so it was actually quite an optimistic time.

DW: Yes.

PALMER: I wouldn't say I was radicalized, but I was certainly aware by then.

DW: And we'd had those three years of the Gough Whitlam Government where they are doing vastly different sort of politics to what the Liberals had done before for 30 years.

PALMER: That's right. So we knew what was possible. Even when [Liberal Prime Minister] Fraser came in, like it was it was still a kind of 'Liberal-light' and you know so it wasn't the draconian kind of Liberal politics we've got now.

DW: And what sort of areas of social work were you attracted to?

PALMER: So I worked in Child Protection then. I moved into Child Protection and worked there for a few years.

DW: For the State Government?

[00:09:45] **PALMER**: Yes, the Department of Child Protection. So I was working out of the Rockingham office.

DW: At university in the late '70s, a lot of university students travelled - did the overland trip to Europe - or whatever. Did you have dreams of doing that?

PALMER: Yes at the beginning of 1980. I finished work, I think it would have been the beginning of 1980 and I went back to the United States working under one of the summer camp programs. So I did that. Then I stayed on in the United States, went back to California and went travelling with some other people that I met in Mexico, and then went to Europe. My brother was in Europe working for Contiki [travel company], so I caught up with him and then just stayed on in England for another 14-15 months, travelling and working.

DW: So you didn't get back to Perth until [your] mid-20s, late-20s?

PALMER: Yes, mid-20s, I think, 1982 or so, yes, I would have been 26 when I got back, but of course the AFS[3] experience was really pivotal because even though I was in San Diego, we were.... the way AFS operated in those days... because AFS was set up as... with the.... my understanding anyway... was set up with kind of the residues of the American Field Service Corps from the First World War with the explicit idea that if everybody got to know people from other countries, then war would be averted.

And so in San Diego County, there were about 60 international exchange students from about 40 different countries. And so we would meet regularly throughout that 12 months. So that group of people I was then connecting with when I was back in Europe, I connected with some of them. And going ahead 40 years, we're now back in contact with each other. So we've now caught up with those people again.

DW: Probably a lot easier with email.

PALMER: Exactly. Exactly. Yes, that's right. So in terms of an international view of the world, AFS set me up for that. So that... not radicalized me.... but gave me a perspective that I guess I took into university with me but was very solidly there, the idea that we are part of an international community.

DW: And that international perspective in the AFS, was any of that based on religion?

PALMER: No.

DW: It wasn't important to you at all? Your parents weren't....?

PALMER: No, no, I think I'd done what probably lots of the youngest child had been, I'd kind of been the one that went to church with my grandmother to keep her happy, and for childcare. Her child care for me was to take me to the church, but it didn't stay with me.

[3] A global network offering international exchange and education opportunities in over 45 countries and hosting of exchange students in 90 countries. Run by a dedicated work of volunteers—more than 4,400 in the US and over 50,000 worldwide. See https://www.afsusa.org/#afs-nav-mission-impact

DW: And along the way, with those travels in America and England, you know the early '80s, there was a lot of protests at Greenham Common[4] and so on, about [short-range nuclear armed] cruise missiles. Did any of that impact you mentally?

PALMER: Yes, it did.

DW: And your worldview?

PALMER: Yes. So my epiphany, and I think most people probably have an epiphany, a point at which they can recognize where they... despite the fact I've done a university degree in social work and I don't think the penny had really dropped about the connection between the personal and the political and what that meant on a global scale. So I just knew that they were really lovely people all around the world and we didn't need to be frightened of people from other countries or from different religions.

But the implication of that happened when I was travelling. I was on my own at one point and watched the documentary *Four minutes to midnight* at a time when in London there were the CND rallies [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament]. And people would make jokes about the fact that at those rallies, there'd be people wanting to save the whales and [support rights for] gays and lesbians, and it was kind of like not understanding - once I saw *Four minutes to midnight* and started to think, then the kind of the dots joined, really, that all of these issues are interconnected.

DW: Did you get active in Europe, did you go on rallies or campaigns?

PALMER: No, when I got home, there was the Rockingham Peace Camp and so I went to that and made some connections there... nothing significant... by that stage I'd come to Bunbury when I came back from Europe, I came to Bunbury to work. So that was in 1982.

DW: Yes, the Rockingham Peace Camp - was that organized by local people from Rockingham or PND [People for Nuclear Disarmament]?

PALMER: No, I think it was PND. I think it was the West Australian one. But it's just that it was at Rockingham because that's where the [Royal Australian Navy] base was on Garden Island.

DW: And so you participated in that?

PALMER: Just visited a couple of times. Yes.

DW: Coming back then to Bunbury to live and work in child protection. Did you maintain an interest in those issues?

PALMER: Yeah, we had a small... Joan [Jenkins] might remember. Joan would have been around, we had a peace group in Bunbury. So this was the beginning of our connection to the Vallentine Peace Group[5]. Yes. So we had a peace group in Bunbury and we used to go down to the wharf and hand out leaflets to the American submarines saying that they

[4] Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was a series of protest camps established to protest nuclear weapons being placed at RAF Greenham Common in Berkshire, England. The camp began in September 1981 after a Welsh group, *Women for Life on Earth*, arrived at Greenham. The camp was active for 19 years and disbanded in 2000. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenham_Common_Women%27s_Peace_Camp

[5] One of the four groups that joined together on 1st January 1990 to form The Greens (WA). See https://www.aec.gov.au/Parties_and_Representatives/party_registration/Deregistered_parties/vpg.htm

were welcome, as sailors they were welcome in our town, but their nuclear powered submarine or nuclear powered boats weren't welcome.

DW: And they brought their boats into Bunbury Harbour?

PALMER: Mmm.

DW: I didn't know that.

[00:15:00] **PALMER**: One of my profound memories is.... I was in a share house, a rental in Victoria Street [Bunbury], down the bottom of Victoria Street, and American ships would be at what's known as the outer harbour, not the inner harbor, the outer harbour, which will close before long. That's where the American ships would berth. And they would have troops of Marines jogging through town and they would jog through town with that very aggressive chanting and they would hold up the traffic. They would have someone break out of formation and do star jumps at the intersections while the troops would keep jogging through the town.

DW: Right! That's amazing.

PALMER: It was absolutely shocking.

DW: What at 4am in the morning or something?

PALMER: During the day. I would remember that was another kind of moment of thinking, 'Oh, my goodness. How does this come to be? That they're allowed to do this'. So it was quite... so it's been a very gradual kind of awareness raising about how and why would we let this happen.

DW: And being in the South West obviously one of the big issues, in the '70s and '80s was old growth logging. Was that something else that you got involved in at all?

PALMER: Not really, I mean, I guess, my interest has always been around the social justice issues and the implications of nuclear war, the implications of poverty, the implications of an unjust system. So the actual green environmental stuff has been more peripheral. So I do remember going down to one of the [anti-logging] camps and again, just visiting, staying for a couple of days, maybe taking some food or something, I can't remember really. So that would be 1993 because I remember I had my two year old with me. She was two at that stage, so that was one of the big camps that was down in the forest near Pemberton.

DW: It still was another eight years before the Gallop Government changed any of that. You mentioned a two year old, so you had started a family here in Bunbury?

PALMER: Yeah, so I had one in '86 and that was the point at which I'd been working in child protection I had been seconded out of child protection to a community development role for about a year and then I went on maternity leave. And while I was on maternity leave, I ran into someone who asked me if I would be interested in doing some sessional teaching at Edith Cowan University.

DW: In community work?

PALMER: Yes.

DW: Or social work?

PALMER: Yes, they weren't teaching social work, they were teaching a social science course, so it was in that area, the social science area.

DW: And Edith Cowan by then had a campus down at Bunbury?

PALMER: Yeah it was the first year, no, second year that the campus was opened. It opened in '85 and I was very pregnant, just about to have a baby and then I started, so I started teaching just one unit sessionally when the baby was six weeks old.

DW: And how many children have you had?

PALMER: Just those two. So I had one in '86 and one in '91.

DW: And your partner, was he involved in these issues as well?

PALMER: No, not particularly. So he's also a social worker. Yes, but he was not particularly involved, [he was] very supportive because at that stage we were starting to form with Green Development and those groups were coming together. And Joan might have mentioned that one of the things that I think has always been unique about the South West, but not necessarily unique, but it's been very special about the South West groups are these kind of residential weekends to discuss policy and ideology and philosophy, as well as campaign strategies. [The weekends] were a big part of that.

So when I would go away to those sorts of weekends, you know, he'd always happily organize his schedule to have the kids for that weekend, you know, like we were together. I'm not saying he was doing the child minding, but very supportive in those sorts of ways.

DW: No, I wasn't aware of those weekends until I went through some material from Green Issue[6] in 1992. There was a big weekend camp at Wellington Mill [in the Ferguson River Valley outside of Bunbury].

PALMER: Yes, yes.

DW: So that's become a regular part of your campaigning and work in the South West, to have those sort of events?

PALMER: It has been less so now because the transition is happening, but it has been happening for quite some time away from that. But yes, that was a big part of it because that was kind of 'walking the talk'. So those weekends were really about living or trying to live by consensus, shared meals, collaborative leadership, all of those things.

Because the peace movement.... the other thing that was really significant for me was the work that was being done by those peace groups in Perth around the [Rockingham] Peace Camp, around consensus decision making, non-hierarchical meeting structures and books

[6] The Greens (WA) members' newsletter. See https://greens.org.au/wa/green-issue

like *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution*[7]*,* were really significant because then you had it all just packaged there ready to go.

DW: I think one of those groups in Fremantle was Groundswell…?

PALMER: Yes.

DW: Doing a lot of that type of work.

PALMER: Yes. Yes. That's right.

DW: I suppose, the other aspect, just looking back, I would expect those sort of camps would bring people together, members and getting to know one another and so on and building trust?

[00:20:12] **PALMER**: Yes. And relationships that held out, you know, they weren't just... we weren't just coming together to do that work, they were friendship groups as well.

DW: The [Green Issue] I mentioned in '92, that was obviously after Greens WA had formed but you're saying you also had them before the Greens were formed in 1990, when Green Development[8] was active.

PALMER: Oh, I'll have to look at my diary.

DW: Or do you think it was just a Greens (WA) sort of…?

PALMER: I think we had them with peace groups. I don't know, I'd have to look in my diary. I'd say we had them, they must have come from somewhere by the time....

DW: But you were active with Green Development before 1990?

PALMER: Yes, yes, I was. I remember I got involved with Green Development, so I'd been part of the local Vallentine Peace Group with Joan and others at that stage and it must have been through that connection when Louise [Duxbury] said she was going to run [for Parliament]. And I have to be embarrassingly …I didn't really understand the political system then. It was kind of like, oh, you could... 'why would you run, you know you're never going to win'?

And then it was like, well, now in the Upper House, it's proportional representation and you've got a better chance. 'Oh, right'. I hadn't really paid attention to that. Prior to that I had, when I was working at Child Protection, somebody there, one of the other workers there had asked me if I would help out the Labor Party. So there was that connection to the Labor Party.

I mean, I always voted Labor, but hadn't ever thought about joining a political party. The idea that there is a political party structure that sits alongside the representation side of it, I don't know that a lot of people understand, I teach politics and policy now, so I realize how

[7] This trainers' manual was first published in 1977 and made a big impact in Australian social change movements during the 1970s when it was used by trainers during the Franklin River dam blockade. See https://www.thechangeagency.org/campaigners-toolkit/activist-education/books/resource-manual-for-a-living-revolution/

[8] Another of the four organisations that founded The Greens (WA) in January 1990.

many students I have who don't recognize that there's that whole infrastructure that sits alongside [Parliament].

So I certainly didn't back then. And I remember going and helping out the Labor Party organize how to vote and people on booths for a while. And then, so whatever year this was, Bob Hawke[9] made the decision to sell uranium to France and they [France] were testing [nuclear bombs] in the Pacific. And I said, 'that's it, I'm out of here'.

So I remember writing to Bob Hawke and saying, 'That's it, like I'm not interested in having anything to do with the Labor Party' and getting a letter back saying, 'Well, what are you going to do, who are you going to vote for?' It was so arrogant! So it must have been around that time or soon after that...

DW: I think it was the [ALP] national conference in Canberra, about '87, I think they made that... they had a.... he ended up with the three mines policy, which wasn't really an anti-uranium policy at all[10].

PALMER: So, yes, and so that would have been in the Green Development time and those connections being made.

DW: Was Green Development a political party or an association to bring people together?

PALMER: It was just an association, I think. Before it grew into a political party it was an association to support a candidate. I don't know, Louise would know, obviously, whether or not it had political party status. I don't know. I don't think it did, was just an association at that point.

DW: And was there any importance in having 'development' in that name - Green Development versus Greens WA?

PALMER: Well, it would have come.... so the Bruntland report was 1986-87[11]? I think so. I think it was probably around that time that development was...

DW: Sustainable development

PALMER: Sustainable development was kind of being thought about. The term was out there then.

DW: Did you have members right across the South West or was it mainly a Bunbury thing because of the population?

PALMER: No, it was from the South West because Lou was in Denmark and I think I'm guessing Giz [Watson] would have been involved in those days. So it was from down that area across the whole South West, because the South West region - Upper House [in the WA Parliament] - captures Albany.

DW: Yes.

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[9] Australian Labor Party Prime Minister from 1983 to 1991. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Hawke

[10] Actually the 1984 ALP National Conference replaced its 'no mines' policy with a 'three mines' policy in recognition of the three uranium mines operating at that time. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three-mine_policy

[11] Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland's was Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development which published its report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Common_Future

PALMER: All the way up to here [Bunbury].

[00:24:17 *Jill Reading* interjects: Forgive me if I just interpolate a tiny bit. The Premier of the State [was] Charles Court. Who had this slogan that he just reiterated and reiterated which was 'industrial development' and the Green Development name was also a reaction to that kind of repetitive, inescapable repetition of this 'industrial development', as so it was the the best thing possible for Western Australia. No critique at all.]

DW: So to have another form of development - Green Development?

PALMER: Yeah, that was it. Like Lou [Duxbury] will be able to explain that much better.

DW: Along the way, did you... once you're in the [Green] party and doing these camps and so on, did you put yourself up for election as as well?

[00:25:04] **PALMER**: Yes, I've run twice, I think, for the Greens, the Lower House seat of Bunbury.

DW: For Bunbury?

PALMER: Yes. So one of those was in... I think I'm not sure.... the second time I did it was in the State election in 2001 and I ran that year because I had just got a scholarship to do my PhD. So I was free to do something else and so I ran, that would have been in March 2001[12], I think. And I had run once before then as well[13].

DW: And what about formal positions - Secretary, Treasurer - was your Greens group here very formal?

PALMER: No, never has been, really. I think that's because it's grown out of those 'processes not a product' or 'the process is the product' kind of ideology that's really been [important], for me anyway, that's been in the South West Greens, whether or not we're organizing around the State Upper House, which is the winnable elections and most recently around [Greens MLC] Diane Evers or whether we're thinking about the [Federal] seat of Forrest, which is different again, or Bunbury.

However, we're thinking about it … I think that history of collaborative, transformative leadership, participative leadership, consensus, decision making runs very deep. We're going back now well over 30 years. So that influences ... and people take on positions, but there's not a.... every now and again somebody who thinks that if they're the chairperson, that they've got all the power, and they don't last very long.

DW: They're probably a bloke are they?

PALMER: Yes they were both times!

DW: Talking about your approach in the South West, is there any tension between your groups down here and the city Greens, in terms of the way they run things?

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[12] The State election was actually held in March 2001 and was won by the ALP. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidates_of_the_2001_Western_Australian_state_election#Legislative_Assembly

[13] In the 1993 State election. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidates_of_the_1993_Western_Australian_state_election#Legislative_Assembly

PALMER: I think there is, yes. I mean, I've most recently been trying to understand that, in the context of the kind of Fundi/Realo[14] kind of difference that's happened in Greens parties all around the world, is that my sense of the Greens in the South West is that it's.... it's got more of that kind of.... it's kind of fundamentalist in the sense of process but not in a rigid kind of way, but it's like if we're not that....

It fits in with me now, most recently with the notion of prefiguring of politics, like we have to start as we mean to go on. I remember having a poster on my car - which my parents were horrified about - at the time of the Rockingham Peace Camp, which said that 'fighting for war is like fucking for virginity'. My parents never quite got over it! But in some ways it's a bit the same. You know, like there is no point being part of a Greens party if you think it's all about competition and hierarchy. Why would you do that? And so as hard as it is to break out of that, I think that's what we've grappled with and try to do.

DW: So the sense I'm getting is that - especially as many of your members have come from movement issues like the peace movement, the women's movement - that being part of the group is not so much about winning seats, but being part of supporting each other, working on an issue. Is that right?

PALMER: That's what it feels like for me. Come election time, all those relationships, all that history gets mobilized to try and get someone into Parliament, and that's how I see it.

DW: So you're happy to do all that work of handing out how to vote and getting posters up, but you're not too worried if you don't win?

PALMER: Oh, we really like it if we win! But we pretty well know which seats we can win and which we can't. So, I mean, as a lower house candidate I've never expected to win. So, you don't expect to win. You know, you're going in there because there's enough evidence that says the lower house candidates kind of support the Upper House, a winnable seat.

DW: What, then, is the importance of running the lower house in Bunbury? Is it just getting the message out is it?

PALMER: Yeah, when you have a platform for that time, I mean, for the period of time for the election, you get interviewed and you get to say what the Greens are about and you get to talk about the ideology. And so it's worth it. Plus, I think the whole way of handing out how to vote cards, people, if they only see 'Upper House' then it doesn't make any sense. People often don't understand how the system works. They need a how to vote cards that says 'Vote one here' and then 'one there'. I think the evidence is pretty strong on that, that you get a better outcome.

DW: Have you had any involvement with the Reps Council over the years? And going up to meetings?

PALMER: I've been to a few meetings, but yeah... my view is that I trust what they're doing is absolutely fine, but I really, I am very grateful to people who go.

[14] Fundis is short for fundamentalists. The term was used for a faction within the German Green Party which was in conflict to the Realo-faction within their party as to what approach to take on policies. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundi_(politics)

DW: When I was looking back over the *Green Issues*, I noticed there was an issue in 1990 about guards on trains. I think you'd written a letter or raised an issue about that...

[00:30:01] **PALMER**: I used to write a lot of letters to the paper.

DW: And then there was another one in '92, a women's international spring event in Bridgetown - WISE.

[00:30:09] **PALMER**: Oh, yes. With Julia Boyle.

DW: So you've had these social interests as you say that are really important, not just the environmental [ones]?

PALMER: Yes. And they overlap. I mean, that's my view is that it all overlaps. So like, you support trains, like you know we do and would campaign actively about any threats to the Australind [train route]. But you do that because it's got multiple benefits. It's good for the environment. It's good for social interaction. It's good from a safety point of view. It's all of those things. So you do it for … the value of it all intersects.

DW: Yeah, in terms of the Greens starting in 1990 with Jo [Vallentine] in the Senate, we've now got two Senators, Rachel [Siewert] and Jordon [Steele-John], and then four members of the [WA] Upper House. Where can the Greens now go in in the next 10 or 20 years?

PALMER: You know, I honestly have no idea. I mean, I feel it is very.... I think it's going to hang together. I mean, I think it's vulnerable, I think it is like all institutions are vulnerable at the moment. No one really, really knows where things are heading. So I'm really pleased that we're having these sorts of conversations, because we as an organization, as an institution, as a structure, we need to be able to kind of metacognate about our process. What is our ideology, what is our philosophy, what does that mean on the ground in terms of being competitive or disrespectful or not able to listen to other points of view?

I think ... one of my fears for the Greens has always been that it will look like lots of people are going to vote Green and then people will want to be candidates for all the wrong reasons. So in some ways, we had that with Adele Carles[15]. That is my recollection of being in the Greens has always been that very much a 'please after you'.

You know one of the things we've had in the South West Greens, which we're at risk of losing if we don't really keep our energy up around it, is to have preselection processes where the candidates have to say why the other person would be really good.

DW: Oh, OK.

PALMER: So that for me symbolized a really important strategic difference between the [South West] Greens and maybe other Greens in other areas and I think we were at risk of losing it because you have to keep your energy up to make that of happen, because people kind of look at you and think, well, that's a bit weird!

DW: Is that something has gone on for 30 years in the South West that...

[15] In 2009 became the first Greens (WA) candidate elected to WA's Lower House, representing the seat of Fremantle. She resigned in May 2010 from the Greens and sat as an independent. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adele_Carles

PALMER: We've tried to keep it going. I think it happened at the last pre-selection too didn't it?

[*Jill Reading* interjects: Um, between, Diane [Evers] and…]

PALMER: …Nelson, I think Nelson [Gilmour] chaired the last pre-selection gathering down in Busselton. Did that happen in that process?

[*Jill Reading* interjects: Yeah, no, I don't remember it happening. I remember it [pre-selection] happening between whoever at the South West women's health centre. I remember it happening the last time.]

PALMER: Yeah. So when Nerilee [Boshammer] and Diane came together.

[Inaudable discussion between Marilyn, Jill Reading and Joan Jenkins.]

PALMER: So those are the structures that I think are really important, and you have to be quite vigilant because we risk becoming mainstream. If we do that, we are going to get that infiltration, I think, of most likely white men, people who are going to be quite aggressive and think now is my chance to become a politician. And so that's why my understanding for the South West Greens has always been a much more 'please after you' kind of culture and a sort of sense if someone really, really, really wants to be a politician, they probably are not the right person.

And I remember hearing that said about Adele Carles and I know that she was really ambitious, I have never met her so I'm not talking about her personally, but about the idea that if someone really, really, really, really wants to be a politician, we probably should be a bit suspicious.

DW: in terms of those processes, obviously a key one for the last 30 years is consensus decision-making at meetings. Is that still a strong philosophy here as well in the South West, or do you think that might be under pressure?

PALMER: I think it's always going to be under pressure because it isn't something that everybody understands, or knows, or supports. So in the early days, partly because we were running parallel with the peace movement and people were going to training programs, how to run a consensus meeting, that sort of stuff, more people were trained in it. More people knew what it meant.

A lot of people now wouldn't know what consensus is. So I think that's when, I say we have to be vigilant, it is about those sorts of things. So I sort of feel like there is a very loose kind of consensus. It's not necessarily following the, you know, the Berit Lakey meeting facilitation, the 'no magic method'[16] kind of approach to the 'T', but I think we've been able to sustain that, at least in principle, I think.

DW: When people join the Greens here now in Bunbury, do they get an introduction to that in the process of how to make consensus work?

[00:35:04] **PALMER**: No, and I think that's one of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities we need to be doing more of that.

[16] See https://www.trainingforchange.org/training_tools/meeting-facilitation-the-no-magic-method/

DW: And about how many members do you have here in Bunbury who are members of the Greens? Approximately.

PALMER: I don't know. Isn't there something like 80 in the South West. We have our meetings ...

[*Jill Reading* interjects: I think we've got about 26 members. But you'd have to check that with Gordon.]

PALMER: In Greater Bunbury? Yes, it would be about that. So we've got to be careful that we don't become cliquey. And I think people looking from outside-in may find it is a bit cliquey because some of us have been in it for so long, it may feel like that....

DW: There's that strong bond with you.

PALMER: Yes. The historic links. So I think we need to be reflective about that.

DW: Going back to your comments about teaching at university and students lack of knowledge about how the political system works - Upper House, Senate, whatever. What's their knowledge of the Greens and the Greens' history here in the South West?

PALMER: Yes. Not…

DW: Not a lot?

PALMER: No, no. I know a lot of students come into social work not realizing that it's got a political arm to it, like it is about changing the system, which results in disadvantage, not just trying to assist at that level of disadvantage at that micro level but intervening in institutions and the kind of cultural aspects as well. So they get quite shocked when they have to do politics units, and aren't necessarily prepared for them.

But often when part of their task is to look at policy in the relationship between politics and policy, is to go off and look at the policies …we get into the ABC Vote Compass[17]. So a lot of them, of course, suddenly realize that they are 'green'. But it's never occurred to them to vote Green because we also know that, for the younger ones, they like to be voting the way their parents did.

So we kind of get them to explore that as a phenomena so that they at least think that they don't have to vote the way their parents did by recognizing that that often happens. But then they actually do Vote Compass and will go online to look at the Greens policies compared to others, a lot of them come back and realize that they resonate with social work values.

DW: I don't want to go back that far Marilyn but you said you started work at the university in 1985-86. Twenty five years - thirty five ago! Students knowledge now of the environment compared to then. How would you compare, you know, old growth logging, the sea, climate change?

PALMER: I honestly don't really feel like it's changed that much in terms of a real understanding. No, I think neoliberalism has dulled a lot of people's capacity to see beyond the market, really. I mean, the discourse around the market is so prevalent.

[17] See https://votecompass.abc.net.au/

DW: But they've got access to social media, Facebook, Twitter, whatever, in terms of getting that knowledge, whereas we didn't have that in the '80s. It was just sort of *The West Australian* [newspaper] in the morning or the ABC News. You don't think that's had any impact?

PALMER: Not in a way that I would think that it has to be more embedded enough to result in action and change. It may be like the environment's important and it's lovely and it's under threat in some way, but helping people to make the connection between something is under threat and I can do something about it, is a huge leap in a culture that doesn't in any way actively encourage people to think that they can do anything other than all people will.... people will say, 'Oh, I recycle.' They know that you've kind of got an interest in that area. It's like, 'Well, I do recycling.' Well, that's great…

DW: You've had a huge involvement in movements and the Greens in the last 30 years. Is there one or two issues that you're really proud of that have happened, either down here or the South West generally, or for the Greens?

PALMER: No I can't think of anything that I have particularly been active or involved in. I mean, I just think we.. when I say we I mean the whole community... but that network of people who think of themselves as Greens, of which I consider myself a part, I think we've done a good job of just holding that tension and holding, within this beautiful environment, so it's not so hard because a lot of people in this, if they don't think of themselves as green, have a real love and respect for the environment.

So they're going to be voting Green, you know, they're going to vote Green even if they're not active in the organization. I think we've actually just kind of held that tension and that possibility for people as a kind of collective. Which I think has been really important.

DW: Right. In light of neoliberalism?

PALMER: Yeah.

DW: Privatisation, and all that?

PALMER: Yeah, all that's come with that.

[*Jill Reading* interjects: Still that damn finger in the dike!]

DW: We've covered quite a bit of ground. Is anything you'd like to add in conclusion?

PALMER: No.

DW: …about the Greens in the last 30 years .

[00:40:03] **PALMER**: No, for me it's been really positive it's been like, you know … one of the things about ideology and the Greens, is that it is an ideology that gives people a sense of identity. Which I think is why it's so hard to get people to shift away from ... a number of people I have handed out how to vote cards with who, when you actually have... particularly women... you have a kind of rational discussion with them about policy ... their policies are pure green, but they stay within the Liberal Party because that's their identity, that they're a business person. Therefore, they need to be voting Liberal. Or they're

aspirational. They might have … their parents might have voted Labor, but they're going to vote Liberal because they're aspirational.

So for me, that's true, it has been a kind of identity for me, but also my family, like my kids, have handed out how to vote cards and my husband gets really active in helping to organize who's going to work on booths, and that sort of stuff. So it's almost like an identity that's come to the family.

DW: And we actually missed getting his name down. Your husband.

PALMER: Oh, Kris.

DW: Kris. Fantastic. Well, thanks, Marilyn, for your time and for your ideas, of course. Thanks for giving up your time this afternoon and talking about your long involvement with the Greens.

PALMER: Thank you. You're welcome. We're learning all about each other!

END OF TRANSCRIPT