

Activist grandmother

Fracking is a way of extracting natural gas from shale rock formations that are often deep underground. It involves pumping water, chemicals and usually sand underground at high pressure to fracture shale – hence the name – and release the gas trapped within to be collected back at the surface. Fracking is potentially harmful to the environment.

I am a 73-year-old grandmother. On a sunny day in the middle of July I found myself sitting in the central reservation of the A583 outside Cuadrilla's fracking site near Blackpool, one arm locked into a steel tube within a brightly coloured wooden box and surrounded by police. I was not alone. Locked into a neighbouring box was my partner, Paul, and my granddaughter, Megan. A few feet away my son, Sebastian, was also locked on, along with two other female friends.

The next morning in the Guardian there was a large photograph of me with a caption describing me as an activist. I almost laughed out loud. I thought I must be the unlikeliest person ever to be described as an activist. Unlikely because of my age and because I am definitely not given to defiance. I do feel deeply about inhumanity, greed, the wrecking of the planet, but thus far I had confined myself to petition-signing, infrequent letter-writing and furious, but powerless, indignation in the company of like-minded friends.

In 2015 I became aware of the fight to prevent Preston New Road in Lancashire becoming the first UK fracking site. I watched, mainly on social media, as others struggled to convince Lancashire county council to vote against it. Did I even write a letter of objection? I don't remember, but I do remember the intense relief I felt when the council turned down Cuadrilla's application.

So when the government, hellbent on forcing this industry forward, declared it to be a national infrastructure project, and Sajid Javid, the local government secretary, overturned the council's decision, my blood boiled. This, I believe, was a microcosm of the corruption, greed, blatant self-interest and arrogance that is wrecking the Earth. Cuadrilla pursued Tina Louise Rothery, one of the prime movers in the resistance to fracking, and took her to court to demand £55,000 for trespass. I was incensed and drove down to the court in Blackpool with my partner to support her. This was the first "active" thing I had ever done and I was not at all sure then that there was really any point to it.

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Similarly, when I decided to go down to the fracking site for the first time with a friend a year ago, I asked myself why I was doing it. I felt anxious, not knowing what to expect

and whether we would be welcome. Almost immediately, as we set off to walk to the site from a nearby farm, we were joined by a member of a local residents' action group, a friendly retired civil servant, who walked with us and told us what kinds of protest had been taking place. I was awed even then, by those who had been at the roadside every day since the work had begun. It was a new world but I recognised their conviction and clarity.

I did research. I delivered my first talk about fracking in my local area. Last month, I witnessed my first "lock-on". For the uninitiated this is where people usually lock their arms on to a bar on the inside of a reinforced (often steel) tube – one person at each end of the tube, forming a chain. People do this as a protest, to disrupt and delay the work at the site by preventing vehicle access, and to gain publicity. Usually a lock-on involves between four and eight people. The more people, the more effective the blockade. It takes the protester-removal team several hours to cut the activists out.

There were more than 300 arrests last year on the site, often of local people – some of them councillors. There is no social licence here for the industry. I was initially astounded that anyone would be brave enough to do a lock-on, and I felt reticent about speaking to the participants directly. They were very different people from me. However I slowly began to have thoughts about my age; how long I had lived; how arrest was not an impossibility for me; and who, if not me, was in a better position to put themselves on the line.

The vandals who are laying waste to what is ours would like us softening on our sofas and living vicariously through TV drama. The real drama is out there. I believe that if enough of us stand up in a thousand small ways, we can take back what is ours. Being a nuisance is uncomfortable when you're used to being compliant, but it's not life-threatening. If we are found guilty in court we could be fined or have to pay costs or both. It's a small price to pay for a livable future.

We are all here for only a cosmic blink but I have loved – am still loving – my brief time as a conscious human being. I want my children and grandchildren and their children to have their moment of consciousness – to know what it is to be alive and to see the beauty of the world, and the vastness of the system we are part of.