

# Green grannies in vanguard of the climate change battle

## ACTIVIST AND GREEN DJ

Val Stevens, 81, from North Leicestershire

VAL, who has two children, three grandchildren and two great grandchildren, started campaigning on environmental issues in 1968. She says: "For me it all began when I read the book *The Population Bomb* by Paul Ehrlich. It was published in 1968 and really opened my eyes to the damage humans are doing to our planet.

"I studied geography at university so I had a good understanding of environmental issues, but living in Edinburgh with two small children I wasn't sure what difference I could make.

"However I knew I had to do something, so I created an exhibition of paintings and poems about the book, and it was displayed in our local library. I subsequently became involved in a conservation group, through which I met Professor Audrey Manning, a respected broadcaster and environmental campaigner.

"He invited me to accompany him when he gave talks on population and the environment, and I soon began giving talks on my own. We moved to Birmingham where I got involved with Friends of the Earth.

"We were very active in campaigning for the environment throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

"I secured my own local radio show all about environmental issues, and I wrote features for an environmental magazine. I'd discuss recycling, traffic pollution, lead in

petrol - whatever readers and listeners wanted to learn about.

"At home we always tried to be as sustainable as possible. I bought clothes for myself and the children at charity shops, we grew our own fruit and vegetables and had a milk delivery so our glass bottles could be reused.

"Today we still grow a lot of our own food and avoid buying plastic as much as we can.

"I'm 81 now and I'm too tired to be getting on trains around the country and going to marches. Instead I regularly write to my MP and newspapers about environmental issues, and I talk to my WI group about how to use less plastic.

"I'm enormously thankful for young campaigners like Greta Thunberg and I find the children who have gone on school strikes in response to climate change inspirational. I think all our years of campaigning have made a difference.

"Campaigning, demonstrating and banging the drum about climate change is certainly nothing new, but I'm glad there is a new generation of activists to carry on the work we started."

**CAMPAIGNER:** Val, right and inset in younger days, has supported green issues since the Sixties, including campaigning against nuclear power and for Friends of the Earth



**DRIVE FOR CHANGE:** After several floods, including one in her son's bedroom, left, Mary decided to find out more about climate change

the floodwater. I remember sitting on my stairs sobbing, knowing we would have to start again. Flooding makes you feel unsafe in your own home and constantly fearful of heavy rain. It takes a huge toll on your mental health.

"Our house was unsealable so instead of moving, I started campaigning and learning how to make my home more resilient. I had no

expertise in flooding or environmental issues at all. I'd studied singing at the Royal College of Music and worked as a jobbing soprano at events.

"But it became apparent to me that climate change and people not respecting the environment was the cause of flooding.

"I learned that because springy, spongy peat has been cut and burned for fuel, and then drained for farming, there was nothing in our fields to soak up heavy rainfall.

"Flood plains where water naturally drains away had been tarmacked and concreted over.

Winter rainfall is set to increase by 50 per cent by 2050.

"In 2014 I addressed 30,000 people from the top deck of an open top bus at a climate change rally in Parliament Square, London. I was on just before Emma Thompson. I was terrified, but I spoke with passion.

"I think that's why people connect with me - I'm not an academic or from a local authority, I'm a mum and grandmother who has lived through this. On social media people know me as Flood Mary, which makes me smile."

## ANGELA TERRY'S TOP FIVE GREEN MONEYSAVERS

1. Hang your laundry outside. The Energy Saving Trust says line-drying your clothes outside in summer saves an average £30 a year on your electricity bill and 95kg CO<sub>2</sub> in emissions.
2. Use natural cleaning products. Soak cloths in white vinegar to tackle limescale. Place a shallow bowl of bicarbonate of soda in your fridge as a natural deodoriser.
3. Save energy and cut heating bills by putting aluminium kitchen foil behind any radiators fitted to outside walls to reflect heat inwards.
4. Buy from charity shops to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, save resources and reduce landfill.
5. Cook from scratch. Processed foods have a bigger carbon footprint than raw or fresh produce. Choose the least processed alternative when you can't.

• For more tips go to

## They might not have Greta Thunberg's global profile, or Extinction Rebellion's divisive tactics, but these eco-warriors have fought to save the planet for decades

**EXCLUSIVE**  
By Jenna Sloan

**Y**OU COULD be mistaken for thinking younger people have a monopoly on saving the planet. Older folks are constantly being told they have ruined the environment with cars, foreign travel and burning fossil fuels. Despite this, there is a "Good Life" generation of women who could teach Greta Thunberg a thing or two. Britain's green grannies have been campaigning on the environment for many years and have no intention of stepping back. When Prince William

urged young people to challenge older generations on the environment, thousands of women over 50 shared stories about how they had been going green for decades. Joanna Lumley, 75, campaigns against single-use plastics and disposable face masks. While 83-year-old actress and environmental activist Jane Fonda insists

older women are at the forefront of finding solutions to climate change. Angela Terry, environmental scientist and green consumer expert, said: "Women have always been at the vanguard of the environmental movement. They might not be high profile but for decades women have turned out, volunteered and made a difference. Older women especially have long known how important protecting the environment is, and have passed that down to children and grandchildren." Here we meet three women who have worked for decades for a greener future.

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## JUST LIKE THE GOOD LIFE

Kathy Hollidge, 66, from Purbeck, Dorset

KATHY'S interest in the environment started as a 14-year-old when she saw the first images of Earth taken from space by NASA's Apollo 8 mission.

She says: "I had always been fascinated by wildlife as a child and I picked up litter wherever I went. My mum's generation had no choice but to reduce, reuse and recycle after the war because there were so few resources." The mother of two adds: "I studied zoology at Reading University, then I worked as a primary school teacher. My husband Peter and I started a smallholding. When I went into labour with my first child I had to milk the goats before going into hospital. It was just like *The Good Life* sitcom. I remember melting snow on our Rayburn boiler in winter for water to wash nappies.

"At work I helped the greening of schools and I ran Wildlife Watch, a Saturday morning kids' group where there would regularly be 60 of us wandering in the woods looking at worms.

"I joined Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace and I tried to live a green life. For everything I've ever bought I've thought, 'Do I need this?'"

"Peter died from Motor Neurone Disease in 2003. I wanted to do something in his name so I donated to an ecology farming project in Brazil and I am still involved. I remarried 12 years ago and we moved to Dorset in 2019. I've joined Purbeck Planet which is a supportive green co-operative. My husband Greg,



**WAY OF LIFE:** Kathy, top and above on her smallholding, was inspired by the Apollo 8 images of Earth taken from space

75, has become very interested in electric cars. Between us we have six grandchildren, and I want a better world for them.

"It's wonderful younger people understand the urgency to protect the planet. They should have an opportunity to be happy and not have to fight for resources."

## THEY CALL ME FLOOD MARY

Mary Dhanraj, 60, from Leabury, Herefordshire

MARY, who has five children and three grandchildren, is known as Flood Mary for her extensive campaigning on flooding and climate change. She began her campaign after her home was flooded for the first time in 1996.

She says: "The first thing I knew about flooding came when my 10-year-old son called out to me in the night, panic-stricken because his downstairs bedroom was filling with water.

"You could not see the River

Severn from our house in Worcester. There was an industrial estate and a large park between us, and we weren't on a flood plain, but that flood was to become the first of many. The downstairs of our house was ruined, it stank, and we lost all our furniture.

"But what upset me most was the irreplaceable items which were destroyed. Memory boxes with the children's first paintings and their baby handprints were ruined.

"We were flooded again in 1998, but the worst time was in 2000.

"We had a playground specially equipped for my youngest son who has autism. It was ruined by