



The Greens (WA)
30th Anniversary History Project
[1990-2020]

An interview with:

Ms VERONICA VANN



4th of August 2020 in Melbourne via Zoom

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.

© The Greens (WA) 2021

INTERVIEWER

David Worth, Greens (WA) History Project Working Group.

TRANSCRIBER

Carolyn Auton, Greens (WA) volunteer.

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.

INTERVIEWEE RIGHTS AND RESEARCHER ACCESS

The Interviewee has granted The Greens (WA) non-exclusive copyright to use, record, copy, edit, exhibit, distribute and make accessible, this transcript, in whole or in part, in any form or media.

To publish, display or use any part of this interview for commercial purposes, please contact The Greens (WA) at office@wa.greens.org.au.

INTRODUCTION

Veronica Vann joined the Greens (WA) in 1991 after being active in the South West Greens and regional environmental campaigns. Previously, Veronica had been involved in the Nursing Mothers Association, and after participating in the Sound Women's Peace Camp in 1984, her focus expanded to include nuclear issues.

Veronica moved to Perth in 1987 to attend university and became active in Greens (WA) working groups and as the Permanent Representative for the South West Greens to the Representatives Council. She also stood for preselection against Christabel Chamarette. Christabel employed Veronica when she became a Senator in 1993, firstly as adviser on Women's Issues and Green Economics and later on environmental issues.

In 1995 Veronica travelled to Europe and actively campaigned against the French nuclear testing program in the Pacific and worked with the European Greens, including the Georgian Greens. For over 24 years from 1996, Veronica worked in Western, Central and Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union initially for an NGO to build campaign capacity on sustainable energy and energy efficiency and later as a consultant on European Union development projects.

On return visits to WA, Veronica worked for the ACF during the 2001 State election and for Greens (WA) MLCs Lynn MacLaren in 2005 and Paul Llewellyn in 2006.

TRANSCRIPT SUMMARY

Time	Topic	Page Number
0 mins	Start of Interview	4
5 mins	Growing up in Bunbury	5
10 mins	Participating in the Women's Peace Camp	7
15 mins	Involved in the Nursing Mothers Association	8
20 mins	Studying at university	10
25 mins	Active in Greens (WA) working groups	11
30 mins	Nominating for preselection	13
35 mins	Adviser for Christabel Chamarette	14
40 mins	Negotiating the <i>Native Title Act</i>	16
45 mins	Study tour to South Africa	18
50 mins	Working with the Greens in Europe	19
55 mins	Working on the 2001 State election campaign for ACF	20
60 mins	Proud of Greens involvement	22
1 hour 5 mins	Data mining and social media	23
1 hour 10 mins	Conclusion of Interview	24

TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:03] DW: My name is David Worth and I'm with Veronica Vann on Tuesday, the 4th of August [2020], and Veronica is in Melbourne and I'm in Perth because of COVID, and all that. So, Veronica, thanks very much for giving up your time.

VANN: You're more than welcome and I'm very pleased to be able to, or I'm very honored to be invited to be part of this project. The Greens (WA) have been very dear to my heart since they started.

DW: Can you describe where you were born and when?

VANN: I was born in Cooma, New South Wales in 1955 and I came over to Western Australia just before I turned seven. We went to Perth, then Albany and then finally settled in Bunbury, before I myself went to Perth in 1986.

DW: Could you just say the name of the town again?

VANN: Cooma - and I actually wasn't living there. I was living in Berridale, but Cooma was the nearest hospital.

DW: And did you have siblings in your family as well?

VANN: Yes, I'm the second of six.

DW: So you would have fond memories of growing up in a large family, at least for the first several years.

VANN: Yes that's right.

DW: Cooma is obviously rural and not a very large town. That area of New South Wales would be lovely to grow up in.

VANN: Well, except that we didn't stay there very long. By the time I reached Bunbury at the age of nine, I had been to seven different schools so we moved around a little bit! We lived in Canberra, then we lived in Parramatta and then finally we came over to Western Australia, as I said, when I was six, going on seven. We started off for six weeks in Albany and then we settled in Bunbury [after around two years in Perth]. I don't have the date off the top of my head, but if I was nine, then it would have been probably 1964 or something like that.

DW: And was all that travel because of your father's or your mother's employment?

VANN: My father was a doctor and he was working in various places and finally settled in Bunbury to do a private psychiatric practice. He decided that as there was nothing [no psychiatric services] in rural Western Australia, Bunbury was the most central for all of that [South West area].

DW: And at home with your family, did you discuss politics very much?

VANN: There were six of us in eight years, so that we were very, very close in age and people tell us that what they remember of us is that we laughed a lot, but we didn't really discuss politics. My family were Liberal voters and quite conservative and I was probably one of the first, I won't claim to be the first, to break from that tradition. Growing up, I don't remember talking about politics, although we did discuss life and how to improve life and spiritual life, not in the religious sense, but all of those kind of things. I think we grew up with this kind of strong sense of trying to make life better for people – a very caring kind of [family].

DW: Formal religion was an important part of your family?

VANN: Yes it was. I went to all-girl Catholic schools all my life, for which I am in some ways eternally grateful because apparently [research has shown that] girls always do better in single-sex schools. My parents were very religious and until I left home, I went to church every Sunday. But I don't think I have grown up with any ill effects from having grown up Catholic. I don't have any abiding sense of guilt.

DW: Fantastic. You arrived in Bunbury. You're still in your formative years, nine years old. It's quite a large city. What were your memories of growing up in that area at the time?

[00:04:49] **VANN:** Bunbury isn't the city that it is now. In fact, it became a city when I was a young adult, and to become a city it had to have a population of 30,000 for three years so if you can imagine 30,000 qualifying as a city. It wasn't very beautiful, it didn't have the beauty that it has today and there wasn't a lot for young people to do. There was a real divide between the people who went to the State schools and the people that went to the Catholic schools, 'Catholic dogs, sitting on logs, eating maggots out of frogs', type of thing so it wasn't the best place to grow up.

And I think things were also difficult, having travelled around to so many different schools, by the time I arrived in Bunbury, I was very shy and withdrawn and I really didn't have any friends at school until I reached high school. It was not an easy place to be. The only thing that was good is that we lived near the beach and so we lived down the beach when we were young.

DW: When you were heading into high school, it would have been towards the end of the '60s. So we've got the social revolution, the anti-Vietnam War. Did those issues impact on you at all at high school?

VANN: No, they didn't. I mean, I say to people, I know it's really odd, but I say to people I was like a 'fruit loop'¹, you know, and I was so caught up in my own emotional issues that I was not really aware of what was going on around me very much. I really became politicized, I think, when I'd had my third child so in '78. Up to that point I did become involved in kind of helping professions I was part of a prison visiting program and that sort of thing, but I really became politicised in '78.

DW: Right, but what was the factor that politicised you then?

VANN: It's hilarious, I have to tell you, it's hilarious because I joined the Nursing Mothers Association². I was invited by a friend to a wine and cheese night, and there were all these wonderful women who were grilling the established medical figures about fathers' participation in birth, reducing the amount of drugs with birth, allowing the child to be in [the hospital room] with you, doing demand feeding. All these things that are normal nowadays, they weren't in that time.

But what really struck me was this well-known West Australian Green, Judyth Salom, was there I also met Jill Reading, whom I understand referred me to you [for the History Project], and a variety of other people. We were all just so pent up and angry and Judyth Salom got up and said, 'You know, these people are our guests, we've invited them to be here, we need to listen to what they say, [but] we do have these issues'. And she enunciated very clearly and without any anger, you know, the issues and it really just turned the tide in the debate on the issues that we were so concerned about.

So, it was really from that moment on [I became politicised] I got very involved with the Nursing Mothers Association but it was really because I connected with the people. They were talking about these kinds of [issues and] what was really important for them and then we got involved with a campaign against the development of an aluminum smelter in the South West.

I say to people there are kind of three pivotal moments in my politicisation. The first one was joining the Nursing Mothers, which I say is hilarious, because it is a breastfeeding organisation. The second one is that, while I was with these people, we went to the Sound Women's Peace Camp in Rockingham³. Do you know, the date of that, because that's something I didn't get a chance to look up.

¹ Veronica added, 'My children tell me I should stop calling myself a 'fruit loop'!'

² Veronica added, 'It is now called the Australian Breastfeeding Association. Hilarious because most people would not see the Nursing Mothers Association as a political organisation, but it was in terms of trying to effect change alongside its core activities of providing information and support to breastfeeding mothers.'

³ Veronica added, 'My memory failed me at that point. In fact, it was at a weekend camp to learn how to be Green in your own way held at the Tone River settlement a former timber mill complex near

DW: No, but I think it was around 1982. [*sic*- 1984⁴]

[00:09:47] **VANN:** Yes that would be about right. I only went because by this time I had three kids in the space of less than four years and so I just went there to get away [or have a break] from the children and I just wanted to walk around and enjoy the scenery. Various people, one called Celia [*sic* Philippa Mair], and I can't remember the names of the other ones [Denise Follett and Marilyn Palmer], which is terrible because they were pivotal and they were the ones that insisted that I come and listen to various talks and that really politicized me on the nuclear disarmament issue, and nuclear power and that sort of thing.

Once awakened, it's very hard to go back to sleep again so I was forever grateful to those people. I always remember Celia [*sic* Philippa], whose surname I can't remember, she used to go to shopping centres and things and she just put up a sign saying 'Green, willing to listen' or something, but 'willing to listen' was the key. She'd just sit there and let people really talk about their concerns and fears and I thought that that kind of started me on another course, [one] of consultation⁵. Really, you know, the more you argue against people, the more entrenched they become. If you allow people time to talk about what they think, invariably they then quite often convince themselves of a different point of view.

DW: You said you had children, three children, were you able to go to university after high school or what happened to you?

VANN: No, and that was a casualty of growing up in Bunbury. You know, like I was a bit of a wild child and I got pregnant and that was a kind of response that slowed me down. Then I got married and I had one child in 1974, one in 1976 and one in 1978 but in fact there were only 22 months between [each of] them so by the time the third one was born I had three children under four [at age 22]. But I was very lucky to have my family. Like, everyone else [my school friends left home] and turned first to go to university or school or whatever and or they're at school [but I had my children before going to university].

My mother was extremely helpful in looking after the children and my husband at the time, he was also very supportive, like if I needed to go to meetings and that

Pemberton which had been turned into holiday cottages. The visit to the Sound Women's Peace Camp came later as a result of being at that camp.

⁴ Held 1-14 December 1984 at Point Peron in Cockburn Sound, near the HMAS Stirling Naval Base on Garden Island and close to Fremantle, where nuclear capable US warships frequently docked and utilized the services of local women for 'rest and recreation'. See <https://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/PR00100b.htm>

⁵ Veronica added, 'I think what I meant here is that this has led to a strong commitment to consultation as a way of seeking people's views and listening to their concerns - 'active listening' it was known as back then.'

sort of thing, he was very good. So I've always had support, and my sister used to come and babysit as well.

DW: Could I ask your husband's name?

VANN: Peter Stanicic. He's still in Bunbury and still an extremely well-known figure down there and a lovely man. We get on very well, you know, in terms of sharing the children.

[Break in interview]

DW: We're just talking, Veronica, about your extraordinary young life of three children very quickly and then somehow you were able to fit in some new political activities, starting with the Nursing Mothers [Association].

VANN: Yeah, well, that's it. I went to the [Nursing Mothers] meeting when my last child was six weeks old, and then I just found this whole community of breastfeeding mothers, of politically active mothers, of just a whole new way of thinking. As I said, my mother was wonderful and a pillar of the community and very much a role model from that point of view. She was very, I mean, she did a lot in the community, you know, school boards and voluntary work and that sort of thing. But it was really just these people just opened my eyes to a different way of thinking, like not any more that kind of conservative approach to politics.

DW: What was your mother's name, Veronica?

VANN: Margaret Vann.

DW: She sounds like an extraordinary mother to step in and assist. And you also sound pretty extraordinary carrying that load. How much of your life did the politics then take up ... your new interests?

[00:14:35] **VANN:** Yeah, that's interesting. Well, I mean, there weren't different compartments in your life, you know, like your friends also had children so you would see them at playgroup, or you'd go over to visit and the kids would have sleepovers and that sort of thing. We were just like one enlarged family. You might be sitting there talking about nappy rash one minute and then about, I don't think the aluminium smelter was on the cards at that point, but pretty close to that [time], the aluminium smelter the next. Jill Reading was very involved in that campaign, more than I was.

I do know with the Nursing Mother's Association, I used to do a radio broadcast. Whenever we had a meeting, I did an interview on the local commercial radio, it was called 6TZ at that time, and we'd just talk about the things that we were [going to be] talking about at the meeting. But it was really about trying to bring childbirth back into the hands of the parents, and in particular the mother, and to make it

more a natural rather than a medically-controlled process. So, less interference in the birth, you know, more natural rhythms for feeding children, that sort of thing.

DW: Yes, interesting going to the Sound Women's Peace Camp and those anti-nuclear activities flowed from being a mother and having young children and thinking about their future?

VANN: I think you're crediting me with the degree of thought that I may not have had [at that time]. I was very [much a] person driven by the heart and a sense of what was important and what wasn't important. I don't know if you remember that book, oh, what was it called? It was the story of two people and what happened? It was a cartoon book or a picture book - do you remember? Oh, what was it called?

DW: The *Blowing in the Wind*? [sic- *When the Wind Blows*⁶]

VANN: Yes. Yes, I think that's it. That was also quite pivotal in my thinking about nuclear issues. I think even though I said I was a bit of a 'fruit loop', I think that at the back of our minds was always that fear that it could just all end and there would be nothing that we could do about it and it was, you know, in the hands of people over which we had no influence or control.

DW: I remember at the same time in the early 1980s, there was a very strong group campaign to save native forests. Did you have any links to those anti-logging activities as well?

VANN: [No, but] later when I was working for Christabel [Chamarette, Greens (WA) Senator], I was very much part of the first forest blockade and provided an enormous amount of support for those activities.

DW: You mentioned your later career with Christabel, at what stage did you get involved with the Greens as an organisation?

VANN: Well, I think that my first act in that field is that I handed out how to votes for Jo Vallentine when she stood [for the Senate] in 1983 and took up her seat in 1984, in Brunswick Junction, which was a very conservative farming community. It was interesting because people would come up and stretch their eyes back and say, 'If it wasn't for the Army, we'd all be looking like this', 'If it wasn't for war, we'd all be ...', and so that was a bit of an eye opener [pardon the pun].

That wasn't really for the Greens, given that Jo was for the Nuclear Disarmament Party at the time and then later became an independent and then a Green [Senator] but that was my first political involvement [on those kinds of issues]. Then I supported very much Lyn Serventy and Louise Duxbury when they

⁶ A 1982 graphic novel by British artist Raymond Briggs, that shows a nuclear attack on Britain by the Soviet Union from the viewpoint of a retired couple, Jim and Hilda Bloggs. The book was later made into an animated film. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_the_Wind_Blows_\(comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_the_Wind_Blows_(comics))

campaigned in the Upper House. But also, really from memory, which, you know, it's such a long time ago and so much has happened, I was handing out how to votes at every election that I could from that point, even after I went overseas. If I came back and I was here for an election, I would hand out for the Greens.

DW: Lyn and Louise stood for election in early 1989, the State election, under the Green Development banner?

VANN: Yes, yes.

DW: The group came together a year later [with others] in 1990 to form the Greens (WA). Were you part of those meetings to put the groups together at all?

[00:20:17] **VANN:** I think only on the periphery, I mean, I did go to the Greens [meetings] and there were people involved with the Green Party in Perth, so I did go to some of those meetings but I don't really recall being part of those kinds of deliberations. [I did not have the time]. I went up from Roelands to Perth with my three kids at the end of 1986 and I was at university from 1987 to 1990. So I was full-time, or almost full-time, studying with three kids and I had a part-time job working as a monitor in the State Parliament, (so I was privy to the debates in State Parliament, you know, as part of my interest in politics).

So, I wasn't really a part of that [the discussions to form the Greens (WA)], and just to jump forward, I wasn't also really deeply involved with the discussions about the West Australian Greens joining the Australian Greens, if you remember, which came sometime later.

DW: What university course did you do when you came up to Perth in 1987?

VANN: Well, again, it was disappointing this wanting to make people's lives better, you know, partly due to my own experience, but partly, you know, just seeing what goes on around you. I was studying psychology, but I found that all the subjects that I was doing as electives met the requirements of a second major, which was politics, philosophy and sociology. It was very difficult doing both because, and I had stand-up discussions with my tutors on this, like in psychology, if you had a statistical significance, either side of 5%, then something, sorry, I can't remember the exact terminology now, but if it was statistically significant, then it was the truth [considered real]⁷.

Everything else that I was doing was talking about truth being transient and dependent on context and time and culture and so the two clashed. I realized that I

⁷ Veronica added, 'As indicated, this is not a true recollection of statistical significance. In statistical hypothesis testing when conducting an experiment or analysing data, statistical significance helps quantify whether a result is likely to occur randomly or by chance or because of a particular factor. Following analysis, if a finding is statistically significant, you can be confident that the observed result is real and is not due to a sampling error.'

would go on and do an honours year but I would decide then which [major] to do my honours in. I decided, and was accepted, to do honours in politics, philosophy and sociology, so the die was well and truly cast by then.

But then it was quite interesting. There were four of us who were working for Christabel [as advisers] and three of us [were still studying], two were doing their masters and I was doing my honours, and all of us, within six weeks or even two or three weeks, [laughs] had dropped out of our courses. We just couldn't work for Christabel and continue studying, it just wasn't possible [as there was not enough time].

DW: What was your thesis on for the honours course you started?

VANN: Well, I hadn't got that far. I probably had some ideas, but I can't remember them now.

DW: So you must have joined the Greens early on, say 1990, 1991?

VANN: Yes. I was part of the Greens almost from the moment they started, the Greens (WA), and I was quite active in the Greens, I think. Before I started working for Christabel, I was on various committees, like I think there was a [Greens (WA)] economics committee [and the] policy committee. I was very, very active with the Greens (WA).

DW: Yes, my records show, you're also the media working group coordinator in 1992-93.

VANN: Oh really, yeah, you can tell me more [than I can remember]. And what about the other groups? Do you have any other information?

DW: Well I have that you were the permanent Rep to the Reps Council for the River Greens, which don't exist anymore. We now have Regional Groups based on Federal electorates, but they must have been a group called the River Greens, 1992-93.

[00:24:53] **VANN:** Oh, yes, look, I'm really sorry not to know. I do know that I used to go to the Reps Councils all the time. Yes, I wonder who they might have been⁸?

DW: I'll do more research on that. So how did you find the Greens processes for consensus and the Reps council worked, as a person interested in politics and working in Parliament as well. How did you find they all worked?

⁸ Veronica added, 'I remember now, at the time I tried to correct this error in the minutes but was not successful. I was representing the South West Greens, which was confused with the Southern River Greens in the minutes.'

VANN: Well, I think for me, the crux of my issues in regard to green politics is that I was [still am] a four pillar Green⁹, so participatory democracy, social justice, ecological and environmental sustainability and peace and disarmament. I think that the thing that distinguished the Greens from all the other ones [parties] was the participatory democracy [pillar] and as part of participatory democracy, consensus is crucial. I think that to me this, even now in all my work, it really just permeated. Even like I've worked on negotiations amongst countries and we've worked on a consensus model and I think unless you have a commitment to consensus, then it's not going to work.

I can understand people [when they] say that you need to have the vote, being able to vote, in the background or as a failsafe procedure. But I think that quite often people too quickly want to vote to resolve issues rather than to try and reach consensus. I also don't believe in compromise, which sounds a bit like it's not a very constructive [approach]. But when I say I don't believe in compromise, I believe in changing position or maybe agreeing to something that you didn't otherwise [previously] agree to. But it isn't a compromise, it is that you have changed how you view it and what you think of the particular issues.

So, I think I really loved in those early days that there was a commitment amongst a lot of people to consensus but there also were quite a lot of people who thought it got in the way of decision-making. It's that whole thing about, it's a means to an end or another means to the end and I am firmly of the belief the means are also the end as well as what you're trying to achieve by these means. Sorry to jump all over the place, but I think this was also a key issue for me when the Greens (WA) wanted to join the Australian Greens. You will have to remind me when that was. Can you remember when that was?

DW: The first ballot was at the end of 1992 and there was quite a long leadup discussion with people putting forward cases 'for' and 'against'.

VANN: Hmm. So, I think I was working for Christabel at that time and so I would have been voting as a Greens member¹⁰ and I would have voted¹¹ against it because I was concerned that the dominance of environmental issues on the East Coast would mean that the Greens (WA) might end up doing things differently. So,

⁹ See <https://greens.org.au/about/four-pillars>

¹⁰ Veronica added, 'Membership of the Greens (WA) was not part of my role as a Senate staffer. Parliamentary resources cannot be used for party activities to further party interests.'

¹¹ Veronica added, 'Poor choice of terminology especially after the previous paragraph on consensus. I suppose it reflects how strongly I felt about the issue at the time. However, although I was opposed, I would not have gone against consensus on this matter and in any case, I was not very involved in the process.'

yeah, so I would have been opposed, but not to [the extent I would block consensus] - also because I was not so involved. When was the second ballot?

DW: In 1997, later in the '90s and then ...

VANN: Yeah, I wasn't around at that time, I was already working overseas.

DW: Can you explain the process of being employed by Christabel? Did she put out advertisements for staff, or how did that work?

[00:29:23] **VANN:** Yes [there were advertisements]. So I actually stood for preselection at the time that she [Christabel] was preselected and Dee Margetts also stood for preselection. Christabel and Dee were miles ahead of the rest of the candidates but I was the first of three or four other candidates. It's an indication of the character of Christabel that she employed me. My understanding is that it was [rigorous] at the time, there was no tap on the shoulder. It was quite a rigorous selection process, there was a [selection] committee of which Jo Trevelyan was part, if I remember rightly.

They [the selection committee] told me for them it was really important to select a complementary team, not only people who could work together, but [who had] complementary skills and talents. I was [included] on both the A and the B teams, particularly for my community connections and work in the community. I think that's really what I brought to that Senate team.

That was another major influence in my life, working with Christabel. She made me more effective [and strategic] in my campaigning. I remember, bouncing up [to her] and bubbling over with ideas and she'd say, 'Yes, but what are you trying to achieve and what's the purpose?', and really to make what we did pertinent and effective, basically. So that's something that's influenced me throughout the rest of my time [professional life].

DW: It was an unusual situation where Christabel had been selected to replace Jo by the Party, but then the State Government wouldn't form the Parliament to accept that. And so she couldn't sit as a Senator for some months. Were you caught up in that and not being able to be employed?

VANN: Yes, we worked voluntarily for six weeks. So she [Christabel] selected the team and then I think we must have found offices. It's a bit hazy there, but we certainly worked voluntarily for six weeks. I think there was a motion in the Senate that was critical of the State Government and within a week Christabel had been able to take her seat. So it was very interesting. I find that very interesting because the Senate is the States' House, you know, it offsets the imbalance, the population imbalance between the different states.

It was also what was behind the Whitlam dismissal, because it must have been [Queensland Premier] Joh Bjelke-Peterson at the time but they refused to approve

a replacement for a [ALP] Senator who died, which then meant that [with] the numbers, Whitlam no longer had a majority in the Senate. It was that hold up by Queensland [State Parliament] that resulted in the circumstances that led to the Dismissal¹². Very topical at the moment. But anyway.

DW: With your employment, did that involve a lot of travel to Canberra for Senate sittings?

[Interruption, with dog barking in background]

VANN: No because my work was very much in Western Australia. I did go to Canberra, of course we all went over for Christabel's original first speech [25 March 1992] but I was very involved with community campaigns and community work. I was just thinking, you know, so the office provided support in terms of [being active] in the political arena, but also for community groups to come and use the resources of the office as part of developing their campaigns. These are community groups, not the Greens (WA), which, of course, we had to say you couldn't use Senate resources for party business, for instance. But [it was given] to the campaigns at that time, with the forest campaign, being something that I was most closely involved with¹³.

[00:34:29] I started off with Christabel as the Women's Issues and Green Economics adviser and then Alan Carter left, when Dee Margetts won her seat. Alan left to become her Principal Private Secretary and we got somebody else in who did women's issues [Ann Reeves and later Franci Williams] and I took over environmental issues from Alan, which is why I was very involved with the forest campaign.

But it was a very exciting time to be involved with or working for Christabel. As well as the forest campaign, Christabel had a very strong focus on consultation again as part of this participatory democracy and I think this is why we got on so well together. We did, I think we called it the Senate roadshow, where we went all over the State. We felt that if we were representing Western Australia, then we had to understand the issues.

We went to various parts of the State to hear what [the issues were], right up north, as well as in the South West. I remember one time at the height of the forest campaign, Christabel and I went to meet with the foresters and the mill workers in,

¹² On 11 November 1975 the ALP Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, was dismissed by Governor General Sir John Kerr, who then commissioned the Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Fraser of the Liberal Party, as caretaker Prime Minister. It has been described as the greatest political and constitutional crisis in Australian history. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_Australian_constitutional_crisis

¹³ Veronica added, 'The support of community groups, involvement and networking on a range of issues by different staffers is well described by journalist Christine Wallace in the *Australian Financial Review*, 9 May 1994'. See <https://www.afr.com/politics/people-power-19940509-k5xk1>

oh there was this little town just near Pemberton, and the name of it escapes me at the moment. Oh isn't that and it's annoying when it's on the tip of your tongue, I meant to look it up and then I got caught up with other things.

DW: Northcliffe?

VANN: Yes, [I think] that's right. There were Christabel and myself on one side of the counter and a mob of angry foresters and mill workers [on the other] and Christabel just listened and asked what their issues were. At the end, you know, there were no more angry mill workers, they said [something along the lines of], 'You know, we probably won't ever agree, but you've made some points that we do agree with', particularly the conditions under which the loggers were working. Everybody¹⁴ had missing digits and there were deaths and that sort of thing. They really, really appreciated the fact that we'd come down to listen and we didn't spruik, we just listened.

So that was the kind of the format really for this, as I said, Senate roadshow. We just advertised that we were coming, publicly and through the Greens groups, and then [we would] just sit there and let people go around and say what they were concerned about. I think that by doing that you allow more voices and interests to be heard in Parliament.

DW: What are your memories of major achievements of Christabel as a Senator, on the environmental front?

VANN: Well, I mean, why choose the environment when she had the four pillars? What was really interesting is that when Dee became elected, Dee and Christabel, in essence, held the balance of power with [Tasmanian Independent] Brian Harradine, a very conservative Catholic [and the Australian Democrats] whenever the Opposition voted against the Government. Now people don't realize that the Opposition and the Government, in those times, voted together quite often and so we had the power of the negative, not the power of the positive¹⁵.

So, yes. The kind of campaigns that I was involved in were the Creery Wetlands [near Mandurah] campaign, which we lost, eventually, [and] the forest campaign, which was more or less won eventually after the 2001 election, the State

¹⁴ Veronica added, 'Not everybody of course, but it was a common injury among forest workers at that time.'

¹⁵ Veronica added, 'We could successfully oppose or block something but we did not have the same power to enforce change.'

election¹⁶. So I think the forests were really the key issue and there would have been little incremental wins, but there wasn't anything major [in Parliament]¹⁷.

I think the two key pillars where Christabel [was most active at the time were Social Justice and Participatory Democracy]. I left in July 1995, so there would have been other things after I left. I do know there were other things after I left. But in that time, there would have been the native title debate, which was absolutely huge, but also this doing politics differently, you know, of not trading across issues¹⁸. I don't know if you're interviewing Christabel or Cathcart Weatherley, who was the Principal Private Secretary, or Alan Carter?

DW: I've interviewed Christabel already, and we talked about the importance of her and Dee in terms of the *Native Title Act*, which finally was passed in 1993 during [ALP PM] Keating's time.

[00:39:57] **VANN:** Yes, yes. And I really think one of the most beautiful stories of that time was of Michael Mansell, and one other person. Michael Mansell was an Aboriginal [person] from Tasmania, even though people were saying that the Aboriginal people had died out in Tasmania, which of course, was not true. But I remember it was he who said [something along the lines], you know when it's said white people don't do anything for the Aboriginal people, remember, there were two women [Christabel and Dee] in Canberra that asked more for the Aboriginal people than they were prepared to ask for themselves'. I think that's it.

But the trouble is, of course, things like native title not being wiped out by pastoral leases, and the determination to stick to the issues [were key achievements]. At one point, Keating was offering some protection for a platypus if we then caved in or agreed to something, which we didn't agree to¹⁹. So I think that that would be a major achievement of Christabel's time when I was there, plus also this, I think to go back to this.

¹⁶ Veronica added, 'Campaigns in other areas we supported included the protection of the Shenton Park Bushland.'

¹⁷ Veronica added, 'However, the community campaign was very successful and had some major achievements in terms of garnering broad support and raising awareness which later resulted in significant changes to the way the forests were managed. Information on the community campaign is given below.'

¹⁸ Veronica added, 'Refusing deals that traded particular issues or values for unrelated outcomes. There were two reasons for this: it made no sense to sacrifice one good for another unrelated good – you negotiated for the best outcome within each issue and from our experience, there was no guarantee that the 'bribes' for support would not be later rescinded.'

¹⁹ Veronica added, 'Again my memory let me down here. The issue was the importance of giving equal weight to each of the four pillars. It was in regard to an amendment erroneously submitted by the Government as a Greens amendment which in effect meant that protection of endangered species would wipe out native title.'

So, there's three pillars. So really the participatory democracy [pillar] with the determination to do politics differently. The staff at Parliament House were just delighted because they could see Christabel's commitment to procedure and process and doing things [differently]. It was not party politics, it was really about representing the people of Western Australia. And then there was the native title debate, which came under the social justice pillar.

And then there was this huge support, huge support that we gave to the forest campaign. We brought together people like Dame Rachel Cleland²⁰ at the time, you know, the Small Business Association, Bill Ethel from the, I think it was the CFS [CFMEU] ... oh, I can't remember which union he was working for, [and other] people who were normally enemies [came together] in a huge campaign. We had people in the trees, or I don't say we, but they were people prepared to blockade.

The support that we were able to give to the community was really pivotal. And we [the campaign] got the lawyers on board so that we [with people living in the relevant region] were bringing injunctions against logging particular pieces of forest because the [WA Liberal] Government was acting against their own policy. It was just phenomenal, the focus and the support. And we worked closely with the green groups and the Greens party and also the Campaign to Save Native Forests, and Wafa, the Western Australian Forest Alliance.

DW: When Christabel became Senator it seems that she didn't take on many staff from Jo's office. Does that make it a bit harder to find out how the Senate works and procedures and so on?

VANN: I could be wrong here, but I understood that they were not interested in being taken on. But you know these people better than me, so maybe I'm wrong. But it was a very steep learning curve. But I think that Christabel's approach was slightly different from Jo [Valentine]'s. Jo was, I mean, Jo is an inspiration and I love her dearly, and an activist. She was first and foremost an activist, she used Parliament in that way.

Whereas I think that, and I don't want to put words in Christabel's mouth here, but it seemed to me that we were part of a wider movement which involved activists, the parties, community groups, and then we were going to, you know, we were the political wing [of the movement] that used the parliamentary arena as part of a concerted campaign on a variety of different issues. But yes, it was a very steep learning curve and I do know that I was given a salutary lesson but I can't

²⁰ A stalwart of the Liberal Party, which her husband Donald, the party's first Federal director, had helped Sir Robert Menzies to establish in 1944, threw herself wholeheartedly into campaigning against the logging of old-growth forests in the South West of Western Australia at the age of 93. This put her at loggerheads with the hierarchy of the Liberal Party. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel_Cleland

[remember the details]. I'm so sorry that it's just been so long ago and so much has happened in my life since then.

But I had a salutary lesson in what was the best thing to do [to be effective in the Parliamentary arena], because there was going to be a change in a regulation, or there was a move to change the regulation. [Because of the Parliamentary procedures governing these regulations], if you just let it go, then the regulation wouldn't be changed. But some environmental activists were determined [to have someone speak on the change] and we were trying to explain to them that the best course of action was not to say anything, but that was just beyond them.

So they got somebody else, I don't know if it was a Green or somebody from the Australian Democrats to raise the issue, and the change that they didn't want to happen actually happened because they didn't listen to our advice [on managing parliamentary procedures]²¹. But that was probably more a reflection of the relationship with some parts of the wider green movement.

DW: You said you left Christabel's office in July '95. Was that to take up employment elsewhere?

[00:45:34] **VANN:** Well, again, I tell everybody I followed my heart, not in a romantic sense, but in what I believed in and was passionate about. So at the end of '94, I joined a work and study group going to South Africa. I'd been at an International Women's Day rally. Ah yes, we were very involved also with women's issues and with preparations for the [UN] Beijing Women's Conference²² and that sort of thing. The issue then was of 'son preference' and that kind of thing. But I'd been at an International Women's Day rally where a woman [Angela Hartwig] was talking about getting up a group to go to South Africa²³ and of course, apartheid had ended in April - they had the elections in April [1994].

This tour was [going to be] at the end of the year and they had quite a [group], I think there was about 10 of us, if I remember but there was nobody working on environmental issues so I went as part of this work and study brigade to South Africa. That was [partly] because when I first went travelling [internationally] in 1990, I had refused to go to South Africa when I had the option of coming home

²¹ Veronica added, 'To clarify, regulations are subordinated legislation. Once an amendment to change a regulation is submitted to Parliament, members have 28 days to object. If there is an objection, the matter is debated and decided by a vote. If no one objects it is passed and becomes law. In this case, the proposed amendment was beneficial, so the best thing to do was not to raise the matter in the Senate because it would likely be lost if it went to a vote and that was precisely what happened.'

²² See <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women>

²³ Veronica added, 'This was a group of people originally from South Africa and other anti-apartheid activists who went to support the development of new South African community based women's, human rights, and environmental organisations.'

through Jo'burg [Johannesburg], or not. I had said [to the travel agent] there was no way I was going to South Africa on that [trip] until it was free [from apartheid]. And so the reason for that very long story, and it was an eye-opening, amazing and fantastic thing to have done, and there's a whole new story of the environmental movement in South Africa, which was [at that time] very white.

So I thought then that I'd used all my holidays, because I went [to South Africa] on secondment from Christabel's office, but I wanted to spend my 40th birthday in Paris. I thought if I wanted to go to Paris, I'd run out of holidays so I couldn't go so the only way to go, you're going to laugh, the only way to go was to resign. And then, of course, with the nuclear testing in the South Pacific in the middle of 1995, I thought, how can I go to Paris when [President Jacques] Chirac was nuclear testing? And I thought, well, the only way I could go to Paris is if I went as an activist against the nuclear testing, which is precisely what I did. I can talk to you about that at another point, or later on in this.

But then I found out later on I did actually have enough holidays and I didn't need to leave my work, but the die was cast. It was also the thing that set me on my path to my eventual work, which is working on European Union international assistance (aid) projects.

Wherever I went, I would always get in contact with the Greens. After campaigning in Paris from July until October, I went to the UK just for a bit of rest and recreation, because it was [very intense campaigning in Paris. But it was] just a fantastic thing to have done. We ended up with something like 10,000 signatures [from people in WA] on a petition which we presented at the Élysée Palace, and we did a demonstration down the Champs-Élysées and all got bundled off into the police station but fortunately, they didn't arrest us.

But what happened [after I left Christabel's office] was that I went to the UK, got in touch with the Greens. The Greens said that this particular person was going off to the Pan-European Environment Ministers' conference in Sofia in Bulgaria [in October 1995]²⁴, and they'd love to have somebody from the Australian Greens to talk to them about the experience in Australia.

[00:49:43] I said I can't represent the Australian Greens but I can tell you about my experience. And, then I met, and this is for you as a nuclear activist, the key issues at that conference, so we're talking '95 here, was the shift of the nuclear industry from the West to the East [Western to Eastern Europe] because it was being closed down all over the West and the hybrid nuclear power plants across the - well they're now part of the European Union, but Central and Eastern Europe. I also met people from Georgia and Ukraine and Hungary and all these other

²⁴ Veronica added, 'I was invited to the NGO conference held in parallel to the official Ministerial conference.' See <https://unece.org/sofia-conference>

[countries], plus organizations working on energy conservation, energy efficiency issues in the UK.

[After the conference] I stayed on because I had never been to Bulgaria, I stayed on for a few days, ran into some Georgians and we walked around the market looking for lace for a wedding veil, coincidentally for their then-environment minister. I didn't realize who it was for at the time. They invited me to come out and work with the Georgian Greens and that's how my current life started. But yes, that was another jaw-dropping, eye-opening moment - to see the cynicism, really, of the nuclear industry that was determined to survive. The next thing they jumped onto was, of course, climate change. You know, the two industries that were the first to give any credence to climate change were the nuclear industry and the insurance industry.

DW: You mentioned earlier in the interview that you'd come back regularly to WA and that you'd help with how to votes and so on. What are the changes you've seen since your involvement in the early 1990s, and the ways that the Greens (WA) have developed as a political party?

VANN: [pauses] I don't want to be critical because I think, 'Who am I to be critical anyway?' Also I didn't know, because my only involvement was to hand out 'how to vote cards' at election time. Actually, that's not true. I worked as an adviser briefly for Paul Llewellyn [Greens (WA) MLC for the South West region] and I worked as an adviser briefly for Lynn MacLaren [Greens (WA) MLC for the South Metro region]. I think my work with Paul was voluntary. My work with Lynn was paid.

I also helped Rachel Siewert [Greens (WA) Senator]. I also stood for preselection when Rachel stood for preselection and I gave her a hand with doing some of the interviews with her when she was recruiting staff. So I hadn't been involved at a State-level with the Greens. I think, and I could be wrong here, but there may have been not so much of an emphasis on the participatory democracy pillar, which is something that was very dear to my heart. You know, this idea of consultation and learning from the wide involvement of a variety of different groups.

Although having said that, I really am not so comfortable talking about this because I wasn't so closely [involved]. From '95 onwards my life diverged [from the Greens (WA)], but I could tell you there was one highlight. My brother David Vann died in Indonesia²⁵ so I came back at the end of 2000. When somebody in your family dies, you think if I was going to die what would I do and I thought I'd immediately come back to be with my family. So I came back and I was there from

²⁵ Veronica added, 'My brother's death obviously was not the highlight but it was the impetus for the highlight which came next.'

the end of 2000 until the middle of 2002 when I went to do an environmental project in Ukraine.

[00:54:26] But it was a pivotal moment and it was actually like the culmination of all my previous work, because I was employed by the Australian Conservation Foundation to run their [2001 State] election campaign for them from a green perspective. It was a tremendous moment because people were very active, in door-knocking, green, for the Green Party yes, but also the green groups, The Wilderness Society, for instance, as well as the Australian Conservation Foundation were door-knocking, having stalls at shopping centres and using all these kind of traditional green campaign tactics.

But also what we did, which I thought was really pivotal, was instead of making an assessment of the environmental or green policies of the different parties, what we did was we made up questions and then scored the parties on their answers to the questions and then developed [and publicized a scorecard] because then it commits those parties to [the responses they had given]. Because it was all done in writing - then they're on paper as having made that kind of commitment (not that paper means so much these days).

The Labor Party [unexpectedly] won the election but they had made a commitment to stopping the logging in the old-growth forests and they also made a commitment to sustainability and they implemented both of these. When I said earlier that it was a type of victory [for the forests], of course, then the issue became the definition of what is old-growth forest and people are still logging the trees today [2020] and that very thing about, which they've also just had a win on, that very thing about how to define old-growth forests, and how to define what could and could not be logged in terms of age of the trees and that sort of thing. They've just had a win on that recently. But it's incredible that here we are 20 years later and still fighting the same battles.

So, then there was a sustainability panel and I was on the sustainability panel giving input to the development of WA's sustainability strategy²⁶. And then I was the Cool Communities Coordinator working on climate change for the Conservation Council of Western Australia [from March 2001] which ended in the middle of 2002, as I said, when I went to take up a job in Ukraine²⁷.

So, I've always been a foot soldier since that point. At one point I realized that [Australia House in] London was the single biggest polling place for Australian polling places and so completely using my own resources, I'd go at night time

²⁶ Veronica added, 'As part of my work for Green (WA) MLC Paul Llewellyn.'

²⁷ Veronica added, 'Working on the implementation of the Aarhus Convention (see <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/aarhus/>) on public participation in environmental decision making in 6 countries of the former Soviet Union.'

mostly because I was working during the day [to hand out 'how to votes'] for the two weeks they did pre-polling in person the two weeks before the elections. It took a lot of time and I did it for two [Federal] elections [1996 and 1998]. I would print out 'How to Vote [Green]' across Australia, not just in Western Australia and I'd hand them all out and then gather them all up, and then hand them all out and then gather them all up. It was also a very good ploy to tell people to recycle them as a way of reinforcing the green message as well.

So I did that and I know now that the Greens, I don't know if anybody recognises my pioneering role there, but I do know that they are still making sure that they cover that [polling place]. I also handed out for the [1999] Referendum on whether Australia became a republic. Of course, the Greens were advocating to vote 'no', again because of participatory democracy, because of the model that was being proposed [for the selection and dismissal of the President]. I don't know if you know about it, but it was really giving all the power to the Prime Minister.

DW: Can I just clarify, you said you did some work for Rachel. Was that when she was running in 2001 or 2005?

VANN: No it was, again, voluntary and she just needed some people to sit on a recruitment committee [in 2005]. It was just for [the role of] her Principal Private Secretary at that time.

DW: So you've covered a lot of ground in your time since joining the Greens and prior to that. What do you think it's meant to you personally having been involved with the Greens?

[00:59:42] **VANN:** It's hard to put into words, but to have been involved with the Greens is one of the greatest things of my life and it brings tears to my eyes to think about it. And I will always [be Green]. I can vote in the UK because I have dual nationality, so I vote Green in UK and I vote Green in WA. But to be part of an organisation that has been so committed to and effective I think, in working on the four pillars and to see the calibre of the people [involved]. These are incredibly competent, committed, dedicated people and you feel proud. I don't think there's anyone I could not feel proud of in the Party, although there was a little minor thing with somebody who withdrew from the Party when they were the Fremantle Greens Member [of State Parliament]²⁸.

But it has been really crucial and it's helped form the kind of person that I am. I think working for Christabel has really made me extremely effective in doing that kind of work in different arenas. I also became quite involved with European

²⁸ Adele Carles was initially elected as a Greens (WA) member at the 2009 Fremantle State by-election, becoming the first Greens candidate to be elected to a State Lower House of Parliament in a single-member seat. She resigned from the Greens and sat in Parliament as an independent in 2010. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adele_Carles

Greens when I was living in the UK, at various times, I was in Brussels for years, and that sort of thing. So I think as a foundation, as a framework for thinking and belief and action, and also particularly my time with Christabel, of how to be effective in doing all of that, I think has been really crucial.

I did sit in on some [recent] meetings with Brad Pettitt [Greens (WA) 2021 candidate]. I was very pleased to hear that he was standing for South Metro²⁹ and the reason why [I sat in on the meetings] is that we're at a really crucial point, I think, in politics at the moment. We've seen it in the UK and I was worried that it would happen also here. A campaign of misinformation and disinformation, you know, and targeted social media campaigns is where elections are won and lost these days. I think you need to do everything that you normally do in an election campaign, but you have to be really aware [of these undercurrents] and that's why I sat in on the meetings.

But then I went from Western Australia to Melbourne. I arrived in Western Australia from the UK in March [2020], middle of March, and then at the end of May, I came over to Victoria to look after my grandchildren so that their parents didn't have to take them to daycare in this [COVID] time. But [this concern has] been vindicated or confirmed in the final release of the report on Russian interference in the Brexit [referendum and elections, and] the lack of action by the government at the time who were also supportive of Brexit.

What people don't realise, too, is that Boris Johnson had a landslide win. But it is a landslide win because of their first past the post electoral system, but also because they targeted [voters particularly through social media]. And so, in fact, Boris won that election with only 13.9 million votes out of a population of 65, 66 million³⁰, whatever it is now and it was through [this kind of] targeting of marginal seats.

So I got involved and didn't do anything further other than raise the issues to be wary of these kind of hidden campaigns. Because before there came this kind of 'mining' of Facebook data, then doing campaigns targeted to people that you think might be susceptible to them, when you're doing everything through the media, then at least you know what people are thinking. But when it's in social media, you have no idea what information people are getting [unless you are in those targeted groups] and I think elections are going to be won and lost on that kind of subterfuge, those kind of under-the-radar, kind of campaigns.

[01:05:09] And it's very clear in the UK that there have been concerted efforts, I'm not saying the Russians are doing it here, but it is in the interests of the other

²⁹ Brad Pettitt was elected as a Member of the Legislative Council at the 2021 State election.

³⁰ The UK's estimated population was 66.8 million in 2019. See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2019estimates>

political, other countries to destabilise countries like Australia, Canada, the US, the UK, the English-speaking countries. But then heaven only knows what's happening in other countries. But I think that we just need to be aware of it and looking for it and taking action to counter it.

DW: As a political party it put some pressure on the Greens (WA) and I imagine Greens in UK to follow suit in terms of using social media and data mining and so on. Have you seen any examples of that overseas?

VANN: In the sense that the Greens do, I'm sure that they make assessments of where their support is and then target [those groups] like young people, the university educated, women, that kind of thing, you know. But there is no disinformation, no lies being peddled. I don't know whether the term 'data mining' could be applied, but targeted messages for different groups, that's always been done. But I would say the Greens have never, or if they have, it would have been an error. I can't say ever because I don't know enough. But I think that the one thing you can rely on is the integrity of the Greens. You look at what happened with Scott Morrison when he realized that, not Scott Morrison, [but Greens (WA) Senator] Scott Ludlam, when he realised [in 2017] he was a dual national, he immediately resigned.

DW: Well Veronica, we've covered a lot in our interview and especially under trying technical terms and dogs barking. Is there anything I've missed that you'd like to add to the record before we close the interview?

VANN: I think the only thing, I talked about crucial points in my life. One was the Nursing Mothers, the other one was the Sound Women's Peace Camp, the other one was going to university and then the last one was really working for Christabel. I think that the thing from university that was really crucial for me and very empowering when it comes to campaigns, is this notion that truth is transitory, that there is no truth that is true across every circumstance, every culture, context, time. And that when you know that, then that's why consensus becomes very important.

And I mean, you still need within that what you consider right and wrong and that's something that will guide what you do, but I think that that is something that really informs my work. The other thing that I think that is also really informs what I do is, and I will get into trouble with this, is that I believe that people are inherently good, and to always look for the good [in people]. I think people do really bad things due to circumstance.

So I think that it was [because of] those kind of things that I felt found a home in the Greens to varying degrees, you know, this idea of consensus, consultation and respect for the individual worth of every human being. And I think that's come through from my time in the Greens as well as, of course, who I am and those

other influences. [But] I'm not sure whether I have been particularly helpful when it comes to the history of the Greens.

DW: I've really enjoyed your insights and especially that critical part where Christabel, as a Senator, set up her office and dealt with some pretty major issues, like the *Native Title Act*. Just really good to get some information about that and also just confirmation about how important those women in the South West have been to the development of the Greens.

VANN: Yes, yes.

[01:10:05] DW: Thanks very much. I'll stop the recording now.

END OF TRANSCRIPT