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Mel (second from right) with fellow Climate Camp protestors (from left to right) Nadia, Natalie and Joanna. Above: police and protestors clash outside the Bank of England.

WEDNESDAY 1ST APRIL, 11.30 AM.

Sipping an Americano in a Costa Coffee on Fenchurch Street in the City of London, Mel Evans looks like any other City worker going over her notes for a meeting. No one would suspect that the pretty, petite, smartly-dressed brunette is in the middle of coordinating a radical political protest that in one hour will make headlines around the world. Twenty-five-year-old Mel typifies a new breed of protestor: young professionals, many of whom have never demonstrated before (they were still at primary school when the Poll Tax Riots were going on). Mel isn't a violent skinhead, a stoner or 'one of those upper-class trustafarian protestors'. Instead, her background is resolutely middle class; she's from Manchester, got five A-levels at school and studied sociology and theatre studies



GRAZIA
EXCLUSIVE

'What's a nice girl like me doing in a riot like this?'

at university. She has been involved in Climate Camp – a radical activist group campaigning for social justice and climate change – for two years and like many of the women who have joined her today, she is bright, highly organised and professional.

Plan A for the day goes like this: at 12.30pm, some 2,000 activists gather outside 62 Bishopsgate and pitch their tents. Twenty-four hours of speeches, workshops and samba dancing follow. Is it really going to be that simple?

AT 12.14PM the three of us – Mel, *Grazia's* photographer Amit (camera concealed) and I – make our way towards Bishopsgate. Ahead of us are a group of laughing girls with flowers in their hair and pop-up tents under their arms, clearly headed for the same place. 'See that? That's the look I need to avoid,' ▶

Forget the snarling balaclava-clad anarchist – there's a new protestor in town, who's smart, professional and prepared to take a day off work to take to the streets. *Grazia* joined some of them on last week's G20 protests to hear what they had to say...

Words: Anna Hart



Left and below: there was a peaceful festival atmosphere in the 24-hour 'flash-camp'

Mel whispers. We turn the corner on to Bishopsgate and see a row of parked police vehicles on our right, but other than that, the street scene looks normal. Then, one tent pops up, and then another. Within minutes the street looks like Glastonbury – the idea being to erect a 24-hour 'flash camp' of hundreds of tents which protestors believe will be harder to move on by the police and will also enable people to wander around and discuss ideas rather than getting them across violently. 'We've sealed both ends of the street,' explains Mel. 'The police vehicles are in our area but they're not stopping us. Now we just need everyone to stay put. As a group, we've got control of this area.' As a Climate Camp organiser, she springs into action-mode, organising toilets, catering facilities and a workshop area. It's a slick operation because it's spearheaded by the likes of PR consultants, policy workers and psychologists all contributing their expertise; a bring-a-skill protest, if you will. The placards are made by Jody Boehnert, a graphic designer. Their media team includes Isabelle Michel, a lecturer in media and culture studies. Professional chefs do the catering, electrical engineers rig up generators and lawyers liaise with police. 'Everyone brings their own skills on a completely voluntary basis,' explains Mel. 'They do it because they believe passionately that the current economic system hasn't just resulted in this financial meltdown, it's also responsible for the climate crisis!' These young women seem to be very much of the



current zeitgeist; more than anything they are looking for meaning in their lives. 'It sounds like a hippy cliché, but I've had much more exhilarating experiences since I got involved with this than I ever got from splurging on something I really don't need,' says Lara Donald, a PR. I begin to wonder where my principles have gone. (My boyfriend later helpfully suggests that they're under the pile of shoes in my wardrobe. He might be right.) So what was their turning point? Did they all wake up one day and think, 'You know what, recycling isn't enough!' For Mel, the turning point was the Iraq war. 'I was 19 when the Government went to war with

Iraq. And when the Government ignored the anti-war protestors, I realised we needed more direct action.' 'A lot of people think of Swampy when they hear the word "protestor";' pitches in Fiona Booth, a 27-year-old housing association manager. 'But we aren't a bunch of hippies. And we're not violent either. Professional women are angry at the Government too.' Many of these women have taken the day off work to protest. But do they tell their bosses what they're up to? 'I've always been honest about it,' says Katherine Pitt, a 36-year-old council worker. Fiona agrees. 'Yesterday I sent an email telling my colleagues exactly where I was going and what I'd be doing. Lots of them emailed back saying, "You go girl!"' As it gets dark, the music gets louder nearer the Bank of England and the G20 protests take on a very different flavour. Police in riot gear have hemmed in increasingly angry protestors from other groups. A protestor collapses and dies. Effigies of bankers are burned. Meanwhile, the mood remains peaceful in Bishopsgate. While they don't agree with people using political protest as an excuse to go on the rampage, there's a palpable distaste for bankers. (City workers haven't helped matters by waving £10 notes and jeering 'Get a proper job' at them.) 'They need to face the consequences and realise their way of doing things got us into this mess,' says Jen, a 30-year-old web editor. Many have friends and relatives who've been made redundant or had their houses repossessed. 'The financial crisis has affected ordinary people, and it's ordinary people that need to be up in arms about it,' she says. Despite the anger, however, there is no sense of hopelessness. These women absolutely believe that they can create a better world. Jasmine Shelton, a 28-year-old lawyer says, 'It's incredibly exciting to rediscover your principles and do something positive about your beliefs.' Mel agrees, 'For the first time in my life, I'm excited about living in Britain. I feel like something is about to change for the better. The fact that so many people are coming together to tackle the threat to society and the environment has really inspired me. It's like we're ready to rethink how we live our lives.' At 6am, the police start using batons and pepper spray on protestors, as campers raise their hands in the air crying out, 'This is not a riot!' By rush hour, Bishopsgate belongs to the bankers again. ■ For more information about Climate Camp visit www.climatecamp.org.uk Let us know what you think about the G20 protests at feedback@graziemagazine.co.uk