



CLAIRE-LISE GILLIÉRON LEVY

Greenpeace Volunteer

Age: 73

Born: Switzerland

Current location

Having spent many years in Zurich and abroad, Claire-Lise has now returned to live in the village (and the house) of her childhood, in Mézières, in the canton of Vaud, in south-western Switzerland.

Why Greenpeace?

When Claire-Lise came across Greenpeace some 25 years ago she knew instantly: this is my place. It wasn't – and isn't – just that she shares all the organisation's ecological aims. The former social worker and social education teacher is particularly passionate about the philosophy of non-violence. For her, non-violence means solving conflicts without violence, handling anger without aggression and showing respect to whomever you are dealing with. It's impressive, Claire-Lise says, how Greenpeace puts this into practice every day.

Hope for the future?

Claire-Lise hopes for a world that is much less based on the kind of consumerism we are seeing today and that takes the environment seriously – not just on paper, but genuinely.

Claire-Lise, Greenpeace turns 40 this year. You have spent more than half that time with the organisation as a volunteer. What makes Greenpeace so special for you?

More than anything, it's about how effectively the organisation translates its philosophy of non-violence into the real world. It's very easy to say this, you know, as a sentence: we are non-violent. But when it comes to actually putting this philosophy into action, every day, things can become difficult. It means solving conflicts without violence. It means dealing with your anger without becoming aggressive. It means respecting whoever it is you are dealing with at any given time. For me, Greenpeace does all these things, again and again. Forty years after it was founded, the organisation also still shows an amazing level of endurance and also of solidarity. I have just seen this again in a film week that took place here in Switzerland, where Greenpeace was involved together with other organisations that share the same aims.

There are many things Greenpeace volunteers can get involved in. What are you up to at the moment?

I'm involved with local actions whenever I feel strong enough, physically. I'm there when we run information stalls, when it's about motivating people to show solidarity, to become a part of this. For a very long time, I visited schools – this is something they train you for in Zurich. A fellow volunteer and I went into schools here and talked to the students about a topic they had chosen beforehand. Those are my main activities.

When it comes to actions, it's important to know – and many people outside of Greenpeace often don't – that whenever there is an action, there has been a long period of negotiations before, of lobbying work and so on. Only if all these efforts are without success, then we say: there will be an action. And to be part of one, as a volunteer, obviously means to follow strict rules – and then later, evaluate what worked and what didn't. To know better for the next time.

In the 1980s, Greenpeace expanded throughout Europe. Greenpeace Switzerland opened in 1984. How did you come across the organisation?

I was working in Zurich at the time. I was very politically active, but when I came across Greenpeace I knew: this is my place. The environment was always close to my heart of course. You know, I grew up in the countryside, in a small Swiss village. I had a garden there and I cared for trees. Nature – and the protection of nature – have always been present for me. Growing up, I was surrounded by good examples. That's a long time ago of course. When I got active with Greenpeace, I was involved with many things but, over time, Greenpeace became my main priority. What mattered for me also was the fact that the organisation was so international; that this wasn't just something that was happening in Switzerland. The international aspect was very important for me and it still is.

Today, Greenpeace works on a number of campaigns – oceans, sustainable agriculture, energy, to name just a few – and many different national issues as part of that. What's particularly important to you?

For me, this is about securing a better quality of life for the coming generations. The topic that is very important for me at the moment – besides the nuclear issue, obviously, which has gained a whole new prominence again, following the disaster at Fukushima in Japan – is the sustainable treatment of our forests here in Switzerland and the preservation of our ancient forests around the world.

More generally speaking, I'm dreaming of a world that is much less based on the kind of consumerism we are seeing today. I'm seeing this, particularly, with young people: They are offered so many things to buy these days – all the time. At the same time, almost nothing is being done to increase their awareness of nature. I hope this will change in the years to come.



What do you wish Greenpeace for the next 40 years?

I wish Greenpeace the stamina to keep going. I wish that many, many more new members will join the existing ones. I hope that we keep solving conflicts without violence and without aggression and I wish Greenpeace that we all keep our amazing ability to argue – our drive to argue – in order to win others over. That's what it's all about.

You have taken another very bold and generous step: you have made Greenpeace a part of your will, haven't you?

That's right. Every year, I'm invited by Greenpeace Switzerland to take part in a meeting with our long-standing supporters, here in Switzerland. We talk about topics that are important for Greenpeace in that year and how important financial support is to keep the work going. On these occasions, I often tell them that I have also thought of Greenpeace in my will. It makes me very happy to know that, even if I'm no longer around, Greenpeace will be able to continue to pursue its aims – with my money. This is very important to me.

Have you ever thought about working for the organisation professionally?

This was never really a question for me. You know, I was asked on several occasions if I wasn't interested to work for Greenpeace professionally, but first I was away from Zurich, then I was working at a school for social work education. I tried to talk there about my work for Greenpeace, of course. Wherever I am, I make the point how important it is to consider our quality of life – and to fight for it. But I didn't want to get engaged in a professional way. I worked for 42 years in social education, first as a social worker, then as a teacher. That was my career. And I was able to do many amazing things for Greenpeace besides that – as a volunteer.

What was amazing for me to see how rich Greenpeace is when it comes to different competencies. Whether on the professional side of things or among volunteers – there are so many complementary skills and competencies; there is so much different expertise. All these things are necessary if you are involved with Greenpeace and because there is so much of it, we're so effective. The good cooperation between the professional staff and the volunteers is vital for this, and of course, an ability to argue and reason. That ability is at the centre of all our work.

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