

One & Other Project

Okay, my name is Tim Jones and I am conducting this interview on behalf of the Wellcome Trust and the One & Other project in London. It's the 5th of September 2009 and the time is a quarter past eight p.m. Can you tell me please your name, your age and where you come from?

My name is Billie Bond, I'm 44, and I'm from Chelmsford.

And when was it you first found out about the One & Other project?

About two, three months ago and I can't remember how, I think we were talking about it at college because I am a mature student doing a 3D design at Colchester Institute and I think we were discussing it there and then I went online, found the site and put my name down and the day I found out I had a place was actually the day I came out of hospital. I had an emergency operation on my back so I was really excited but then I thought, "What if they don't let me go on?" But you said you let disabled go on so because I am a bit disabled now, because of my leg is weak after the surgery, so it's been a real challenge for me getting prepared for it, it's helped me focus and keep my mind off feeling sorry for myself after surgery.

For the record, what was the problem with your back?

Well, I've had back problems for most of my life, I used to be a nurse and I had my own business and for the last four years I've been a lady painter decorator and mural artist but the painting and decorating took its toll and it was actually my own bathroom I was doing and my back, my disc went completely in my back and I had to be rushed in and have emergency service otherwise I would have been permanently disabled if they didn't do anything. So it had to be done quite quickly but I'm here and walking so that's great.

So tell us a bit more about the various versions of you. I guess, the different jobs you've been through, what have they been like?

Yes, well I had, my husband and I had a business, Billy Bond Designs, we designed and made hand painted children's furniture. It was a mail order company but we supplied Selfridges and John Lewis. We sold the business about five years ago because I had children grown up, we wanted to move on and do other things, my husband is still a carpenter and joiner, I was still doing children's interiors with the murals but also painting and decorating as well but then, of course, with the trouble with my back I had to think of a career change and I thought well at my age teaching with my experience would be the best option for me. So, as I say, last year I signed up to do a degree in 3D design and that's what I am doing now and I love it, of course, doing this project is perfect for my experience for my degree.

And how are you finding it returning to college as a mature student?

Very frustrated to start with because obviously running a business everything is time is money, you have to do things quickly, going to college is completely different, it's all so laid back, no one seems to worry about this or that and it took me a while to

One & Other Project

come down off my pedestal, if you like, to fit in with the laid back attitude of higher education.

And what else about you, what do you get up to in your spare time?

Well, I used to like gardening but I can't do that now because of my back. I've got three teenagers and two of them are going off to uni this September so in fact I have been very busy but the house will be really empty and quiet when the two of them have gone. I've got a fifteen year old who would be sort of a bit lost for things to do I think when they've gone, the other two have gone but I do always keep myself busy because I do work as well or I have been until I had to go into hospital so I am taking it easy now.

So how did you feel when you received the email that you have been allocated a slot?

Well really excited except oh no, will I be able to do it? Hmm, and then I realised I could and straight away I knew what I wanted to do, hmm, I wanted to do a sculpture on a sculpture you know on the plinth because that's what I am specialising at college and I knew straight away I wanted to, hmm, do a sculpture of my sister, she has Downs syndrome and a few months ago I saw her perform on stage as a mermaid dancing and it was with an active arts group that is funded by her local Mencap, it's like a project for all the arts, they do singing and dancing and you know hands on art and you know to see her perform on stage and all the other people with learning difficulties it was absolutely fantastic, the dedication of the staff, everyone enjoyed it, all the students on the stage, even quite severely disabled people up there and they were having the time of their lives it was so enjoyable to watch so I knew straight away I wanted to raise awareness of the importance of arts to everyone whatever your ability or disability, you know it's there for everyone to enjoy so I want to promote active arts for my sister and the project she is involved with.

And who would you say you are doing this for, going on to the plinth?

For Active arts and for me, for my art, so it's a combination of the two, you know. I couldn't sit up there and do nothing, I'm not a do nothing person, I don't read, so I wouldn't like to read up there, I like making things so that's what I am going to do.

So how did you describe yourself on the website, how did you describe yourself as a person?

Oh, positive, always doing things, keeping busy, stubborn, if I've got something set in my mind I will do it, my poor husband, it drives him round the bend but you know that's what I enjoy in life, doing things, moving and doing something, I am always doing something different and I am always positive.

And what would you say are the most important things in your life at the moment?

Oh, well, my family obviously, the kids, love the kids, encourage them as much as I can. My daughter is here, the oldest son is here, my son is going to watch it from

One & Other Project

home, he's a teenager, he wasn't really up for coming to London and the little ones are at a party but they are going to watch it online so yes, and the other thing that's important to me is doing this degree and being involved with as much art as I can so that once I qualify I can venture off into specialising in sculpture but also teaching, that's what I want to do because at my ripe old age, you see I won't be starting another business really.

So what, why teaching, what's your interest in teaching?

Because of my experience running a business, designing furniture, there's a sort of interior design there with the children's rooms, merchandising, selling, when you run your own business you are selling yourself, you gain so much experience in so many fields because at the end of the day you have to do all the jobs or teach other people to do it or delegate. So that, to me, I think is vital experience to pass on in higher education to other people in the art world who want to go on and start their own business. I've been there so I can advise, oh you don't want to do that but do that, but very often you learn by your mistakes anyway so I'd encourage people to have a go at anything but teaching is definitely where I want to be in the next few years.

And how about sculpture?

Oh sculpture, I love it! It's only in the last few years that I've discovered that 3D is what I'm really good at, you know some people are really good at Maths and writing and sketching but I can just transform something on paper into a 3D sculpture, it comes naturally and I love doing it so, yes, I have my 3D sculpture waiting to go on the plinth.

What hopes and fears do you have for the future?

Well, I hope that my back gets better and that my leg... because at the moment it is still quite numb. They said after eighteen months hopefully it should be back to normal, fingers crossed and, well, eventually that I do get into teaching, that my kids do what they do at university and have happy lives, my husband is still there behind me encouraging me, yes, and you know Nick my sister from this project hopefully some good will come of that and we raise some money to go towards their project because they rely on charity funding and it helps subsidise as anyone knows who's involved with acting or drama, it costs a fortune to put productions on stage and what have you so they are always in need of financial help.

And how does it feel being part of an Antony Gormley piece of art?

Brilliant because as I am specialising in sculpture I'd only seen the Angel of the North because I am actually from Newcastle. But this summer holiday, just before my back went off, my husband and I like to go off as much as we can and we did on a motorbike away for weekends and we went up to Liverpool to see, is it another place? His statues on the beach and that's the photograph I've used for my plinth thing, I'm standing next to one of his sculptures there, amazing it was, absolutely amazing. Mind you, the beach was another place I tell you, you wouldn't want to sunbathe on that beach, it's horrible, but anyway I should do some more homework

One & Other Project

on Antony Gormley. I've had a look on some of his projects before but this is quite new to me and I'm loving it, I'm learning all the time, you know, I'm really enjoying it, but it's figurative sculpture that I want to do and, of course, Antony Gormley is figurative sculpture himself most of it so ...

So how are you feeling just before you go up on the plinth?

I'm looking forward to it. I was a bit stressed just an hour ago because we were stuck in traffic for two hours and I thought we never going to get here but anyway I'm here yes, looking forward to it.

Great, thank you very much.

Thank you.