

One & Other Project

Okay so my name is Tim Jones and I'm conducting this interview on behalf of the Wellcome Trust and the One & Other project in Trafalgar Square, London. It's the 6th of October 2009 and the time is approximately 4:20 in the morning. Can you please tell us your name, your age and where you come from?

Okay. Trixi Blair, I'm 63 years old and I live in Watford in Hertfordshire. I'm originally from Hungary and I came here as a child when I was about ten which was straight after the Hungarian revolution in 1956 we actually got here in August '57 I spent a few months in Austria before we came here.

Okay.

So I've had all my schooling here but I've never managed to lose my accent.

Can you remember much of Hungary before you came over?

Yes very much indeed and I suppose it was such an upheaval that in the process I don't think my parents ever managed to explain to me why we had to leave and so it was a hugely traumatic experience and to arrive here to an unknown place where I couldn't speak any English and everything seemed grey and dull and rainy and I have to say I hated it which is the reason why I think I never lost my accent because in Italy I didn't like being here.

Okay, so what was that like then, can you recount some of your experiences, can you recount some things, a memory you have of Hungary before maybe?

Yes.

Could you tell us a bit about that and maybe tell us a little story of when you actually arrived here and what that was like?

Okay, well for me my childhood seemed idyllic in Hungary but I know in retrospect that it wasn't because it was during the Russian communist era behind that iron curtain. But because my parents were afraid that I might blurt out something at school they never told me how they felt about the regime so that's why I didn't understand why we had to leave. When we arrived in Vienna we ... my mother and my sister and I actually went and stayed in a refugee camp for quite a few months my father got a job in Vienna and it took about eight months to sort out where we were going to go from there and eventually my parents got a work permit to come to England and we arrived here as refugees and... they had some friends here who organised for me to attend a convent school and my initial experience there was not good there either because I had never seen nuns in my life and, as I say, it was another shocking experience. We had no money so this was a private convent and my initial, for the first few years I was terribly aware that all my uniforms were hand me downs and children, girls at that age, are not always nice and my initial experience in that convent were not nice we lived in Muswell Hill in London and

One & Other Project

because my parents all had to work at the age of eleven, I was travelling by myself from Muswell Hill into Bayswater on the bus and I think it is a sort of thing that we don't do to children anymore but at that time it was quite normal. It took about a year to learn English and once I learnt I got to love the convent and I made some really good friends who are still friends of mine today but it was initially very difficult.

So how does it feel then to be part of, what are your thoughts of being part of the One & Other project?

It's tremendously exciting. I applied and obviously like anyone else I never thought I get a place and when I did get the place there were two or three things in my mind about what I would like to do but in the end I chose the one that I felt very strongly about for a very, very long time and that's to do with ageing and, would you like me to say more about it?

Yes please expand on what you are going to be doing and why you have chosen you know that cause.

Fine. When I finished my, I did a postgraduate diploma in social administration at the London school of Economics and that was back in 1969 and I went on to do a research project as a research assistant which was to evaluate the effectiveness of the voluntary agency which was called Task Force and Task Force put young school children in touch with older people in London and with a view to alleviate their loneliness and helping them with their shopping, gardening, with decorating and it was an eighteen months project and through that I became very aware of the problems of ageing and so on and then later on we moved to Staffordshire and I got a job with a foundation called Best Johnson foundation. This was in the 1970s and I was their research officer and that organisation ... again its objectives are to improve the quality of life of older people and I also taught on an Open University course called An Ageing Population and through all the reflection that I did at the time I sort of gradually came to realise that actually what would be needed here would be a sort of great power movement you know a self help group of older people who would be campaigning for improving the situation of older people in our society and then I went on to do other things I taught sociology in an FE college for over twenty years but last Autumn I attended a lecture given by someone called Julia Neuberger she had just written a book called *Not Dead Yet*, a manifesto for old age, and she just came out with all these thoughts about ageing that you know felt really it ran true with everything that I had always thought of and her message was get angry, get the barricades set up, a great power movement. There is one ... there was one in America which was very powerful and I thought yes you know because until then I thought maybe this is just me who thinks that there is such a need so I suppose that's encouraged me to think much more about it and that's why I've ended up choosing this theme for the one hour.

So what are you going to be doing then for the duration of the hour, are you taking

One & Other Project

anything up there, what are you planning to say?

Yes, well it's going to be very boring and I think people are going to fall asleep if they are up at this unearthly hour or watch later, I've got a lecture on ageism, which is very much based on Julia Neuberger's book. I have actually been in touch with her PA and I've got permission to do this, yes, I'm going to be talking about the different thing that need improving for when we get to old age I've got my t-shirt well my sweater 'older and bolder' I've got a banner that I think Age UK are bringing for me which will say something like 'too old to be employed but young enough to stand on the plinth at 5 a.m.' And I've got ten placards with the points that Julia Neuberger puts forward in her manifesto that need changing so I'm going to hold each one in turn and talk to each one in turn and with any luck I might have some music as well about ageing like the one by the Beatles 'when I'm 64' and things like that.

Great, so what kind of impact / effect would you like your hour to have?

Well it would be a lovely to think that through it that there would be other people who feel like I do I'm ... I don't ... obviously the dream would be that there would be somebody that would come and lead a great power movement. I don't think it's me. I would love Julia Neuberger to lead it but I'm not sure although she talked about it I don't think she would want to and that's the problem, I think any movement like that would need somebody charismatic, somebody really well known would want to run with it so even if nothing dramatic happens I hope it will raise awareness that older people need to do something themselves.

Great so what would you say, how would you describe yourself?

Terribly confused I think ... is that how you mean? My personality, is that how...?

Yes, yes, yes.

Hopefully confused, I think partly to do with this traumatic childhood that was traumatic for me because once we got to England I thought that I'd never ever see Hungary again because obviously no one had any idea that the wall would come down and that we would be able to go back so about thirty, forty years I lived with this sense of loss and it also gave me a huge amount of insecurity and then, even to do with religion, I think a lot of confusion because I was brought up initially as nothing and then I went to a convent, became an awfully committed catholic, then I married someone who is Jewish. I am Jewish by origin and so there's such a fusion of different cultures and different religions. I don't believe in any religions really, I think I'm an agnostic and then even in my personality I'm very shy and reticent on the one hand but there must be an element of exhibitionism in me because otherwise I wouldn't have volunteered to go up there on the plinth so I think I'm over sensitive and I'm sort of moderately intelligent. I think I ... I'm very much in awe of authority figures or people who I think are much brighter than me. Anything you'd like me to

One & Other Project

elaborate further?

You mentioned your husband a couple of times. Can you talk about your family?

Yes sure, he's wonderful, he's been incredibly supportive, he is very laid back so it's just right for me because I tend to be so neurotic. He balances me out, we are both in education, we both spent our lives in the public sector. We've got two fantastic daughters who are grown up, both are married, one has a baby and the other one is expecting a baby so really I consider them my greatest achievements in life.

Perfect and what kind of plans, hopes, fears do you have for the future?

Well I'm now in my 60s and I have sort of retired but I'm not happy to be staying at home. I didn't want to retire so now I have chosen a career for myself in retirement I'm training to be an advisor with the citizens advise bureau in Hertsmere near where I live so that is what I'm planning to do for as long as I can, plus to look after my grandchildren I think.

Great and going back to the plinth again, how are you feeling twenty minutes just before you go onto the plinth?

Well I feel all right but I'm just terribly scared. Once I'm up there I'll go totally and utterly blank so hopefully I won't ... it's terribly strange because I would be absolutely petrified to hold forth to an audience of adults. I'm very used to talking to younger people through lecturing in this college but I think I would be hopefully in awe of doing that but because it's on camera I'm hoping I'll forget that there is anybody watching what I'm doing because ... and also I'm terribly scared of being a huge embarrassment to my family and anyone else, my friends or colleagues who could be watching. I'm scared of being an embarrassment, they will all cringe.

So have you got anything to say about being part of the One & Other project, to be one of the 2400 people that get to share the experience?

I think it's an incredible project, you know, as a sociologist it's wonderful to have this cross-section of the population and I have watched a lot of other people up there and it is just a wonderful, wonderful initiative. I'm very grateful to Antony Gormley and for the One & Other team to give me this opportunity.

And finally who would you say you are doing this for?

Who am I doing this for... presumably... firstly for myself. I can't ... perhaps for all the people in general hopefully, is that what you mean? Yes.

Perfect, thank you very much.

Thank you very much.



One & Other Project