

## One & Other Project

[Interviewer's voice is very quiet].

*Hello my name is Emma, I'm interviewing on behalf of Wellcome Trust and One and Other, it's the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2009 and it's 40 minutes past 2 a.m. [loud siren in the background]. Can I please ask you for your full name, date of birth and where you come from?*

Hi, my full name is Oliver David Jackson, my date of birth is 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1956 and right now I live in Ealing in Cambridgeshire.

*How do you feel now?*

OK, a bit tired.

*Can I ask how you found out [louder sirens in the background] about the project?*

Umm, yeah, just from the media. I can't think of anything specific. I think the radio or on the internet probably, yeah.

*And what was it that made you apply?*

I quite like the idea of the democratisation of the plinth by Antony Gormley. I thought that's a good thing to do, well I put my name down, but I didn't expect to be selected to be honest, so yeah I think there is room for more participation in art. It doesn't happen, Antony Gormley does it and a few more people around the world do it but it's to be encouraged.

*Can I ask what you are going to do up there?*

Yep, I'm just gonna talk really, witter on. I've taken on board that this is supposed to be a snapshot of Britain and we all got these little hour slots, 2400 of them, so I thought I would paint a self-portrait but mainly talking about my family and there's yeah, certain amounts of my, there are going to be some changes to my family fairly soon and I shall use it as a kind of catharsis to help me come to terms with that I think.

*Would it be OK if I asked what those changes are going to be?*

Yeah my wife is about to die actually; she's got cancer and umm she hasn't got much longer to live, umm, probably weeks.

*Is she watching?*

Umm no, she's not really well enough, but she'll watch tomorrow, I'm going to, I'm not really good with these kind of things, umm, so rather sadly I think a bit of it might be a kind of an oration which I could do because there is nobody I know here. I wouldn't be able to do it when I should so and I think it might just help me get a few things straight and sorted for myself because these things, do you mean if I talk on a bit? Umm it's not easy, you get very tired, I haven't slept for months now I suppose

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properly and it's very difficult to see outside, what's going on so I think I'm not going to talk about this exclusively, I just, but I think it might help clear my yeah, umm, my mind a bit to get it out. [very quiet voice].

*Can I ask who else constitutes your family?*

Yeah we have two children who are in their early 20s. I have a sister who is very close to us and I have a father who I mentioned. I thought I'd mention my family from when I was young; my mother who's dead, my father, my sister and talk about my kids and then talk about my wife, yeah, and I think I'd like to talk about how I'd like to remember her that's all.

*Could you tell me a bit about that, when did you meet?*

Who my wife?

Hmm.

Umm, we met at a party really a long time ago probably before you were born.

*How long?*

Definitely before you were born. In the mid '70s [chuckles]. There you go, we started, we moved in together in 1978 and then we got married in 1981, a long time.

*Are there any points in your relationships that stand out?*

Points?

*Memories.*

Yeah, umm, not so much [pause], the birth of our children really, we've done a lot, we moved a lot. We moved from London to the West country to Italy and back to London and up to Cambridge so we put a lot in, you know, we fill the time. It's not so much points, I want to think about, it's more, I mean she is very ill now, she's very yellow she looks like she is auditioning for the Simpsons umm and that's not how I'd like to remember her and this is stuff hopefully I'll say on the plinth. I haven't done any timing, it is going to be off the cuff but umm I've spent a lot of time, you know, when you don't sleep at night for obvious reasons thinking about, yeah, how I think I will actually remember and how I'd like to so that's not, it sounds really miserable doesn't it, but it's not that I think, it just is, yeah.

*What took you to Italy?*

[Pause] Well umm the '80s we were living in the West Country in Bath in [inaud]. It was fantastic, umm but things changed. I was on the end of the kind of hippy times when I was young and I was born probably 5 years too late and I think I still have that kind of ethos and things changed a lot in the '80s, the miners' strike really affected me, I felt very strongly, I thought it was a disgrace and while Thatcher was running

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this country, I don't want to get too political, but she did a lot of damage and we haven't recovered. She closed down industries, people lost their self-respect. Umm a guy from Coventry came and drove up to Downing Street in those days [more sirens in the background], not quite as now and tortured himself and killed himself and I remember the next day he must have been you know, mentally deranged, the guy lost his job he had no future of course he was mentally deranged and I just felt I didn't want my children to grow up in a society where it was seen legitimate to stab people in the back to get up the greasy pole. Umm so we went just to see if there were better places.

*Did the miners' strike have any effect on you [inaud – interviewer's voice is very quiet]?*

No, I would [give a] day's wages to the strike, I would, [I] went, there were strikes, I would [go] when we were asked to come out. I would not turn up to work but I just felt it was appalling the way decent people were treated and now, I don't know, you go to Wales, there are towns which are just empty. You know, there was no planning, they could have been done better, they could have had re-training programmes people could have kept their pride and self-esteem and it's gone and I think you still see it now. OK I'm an old man now, getting grumpy, but yeah it makes me very said, I think irreparable damage was done to us by our society then to be honest. This last decade hasn't helped, either the Blair years have perpetuated the Thatcher philosophy, umm, and yeah maybe I'm just out of touch now, just getting too old for it and, but a bit more love and care, you know, looking after each other I think would go a long way.

*What do you think the future is going to bring?*

I don't know, umm, I don't know. I'm encouraged by the fact my kids aren't worried about it, you know, they don't, you know, they just take it in their stride. Umm so I think it's just me probably losing touch, getting out of, you know, out of kilter with most other people but there you go.

*And what about you, what does the future bring for you?*

I don't know really. Umm I haven't really had a conventional life anyway. When we came back from Italy, well I run a company for a while. I'm not really a company man and I made for me a disgusting amount of money so when our kids went to university I went to university. I gave up work. I went to UCL and I did a degree which is just as well because it's when my wife was just diagnosed in 2005 and I haven't worked since after the degree, umm, I've just been looking after her staying at home really. Umm I might go back into academia. I might travel. I was born in Africa and yeah I've always travelled a fair bit so I don't know how these future events are going to affect me and the kids, my daughter is off to Paris at the end of the month she's got a job there. She finished her degree so, yeah, you can prepare yourself for these kind of things, but not until they happen, you don't know what's going to happen. But, yeah I quite like the idea of maybe going living [and] in Japan for a couple of years teaching. I don't know, I don't know, I [shall] probably stay at home, get more miserable take to drink and kick the cat.

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*What did you study at UCL?*

Linguistics.

*Was that something you were always interested in?*

Umm yeah I've always been interested in languages. The way people communicate and how they do it. Linguistics at UCL is a bit outside of MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] where Chomsky teaches. It is the pious [who go] to study Chomsky in linguistics. He has a philosophy about the innateness of language, he has this innateness hypothesis. I don't know if you know anything about it, he claims a language learning faculty [is present] when we are born; it's innate in us. We are marshalled to come on earth [so] that we all report back and we all speak the same language. We just use different parameters, we just use different grammars, different lexicon; different words. Umm and there seems to be a fair amount of evidence to support this. There are a lot of linguistics professors who think it's rubbish so, but that's what attracts me. Chomsky is a great man, great, great man. I think he's belittled in America a lot because he speaks up against the government. He's a thorn in their side but as with Simon Cohen Morris here in the UK people will dilute any effectiveness of their message by the fact they are not quite behaving as they should. If you are a professor and you are clever, you don't get involved in politics, Cohen Morris, he's clever, he's a professor and he shouldn't be so religious you know he's a *pagantologist*? How does he square religion with the data of a fossil record? Umm so yeah, I think in hindsight the man, the head of the department when I was there [inaud] Smith, he's retired now, he feels Chomsky will be as famous as Newton in future and Newton is not a man to be taken lightly so there you are.

*Can I ask if you are religious?*

If I am religious? Umm, I don't think so. No my son is completely against religion. He's of the umm, the Dawkin's, view that religion is holding us all back but I like literature a lot and I spent some time, can I witter on about it? OK umm there are two great English writers before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I'm a big [fan?] of Becket, it has to be said but I spent a lot of time really affected by William Blake who had very strange ideas; he was a visionary. He had a vision; he was a weird bloke but as far as I understand it, I'm not sure, I understand it completely. He had this idea that god and man were interdependent, that one couldn't live without the other. He had no truck with the established church as such, he believed he wanted to commune with god. He did it one-to-one, but, umm, I put this very briefly, but basically he believed that were man to be obliterated, god would no longer exist either; quite a complex theory and that, I mean that is, there are ways of looking into that, it's almost like an atheistic view but that quite affected me and even now I still think about it quite a lot. I go back to Blake quite often and the other guy is John Donne who is just fantastic, do you know about Donne? He was a real late [incomp], he wrote this fantastic licentious poetry about seducing women really and ended up in St. Paul's from the [incomp] with his fantastic sermons about how we should all follow the religious path. He became an Abbot by status, you know, he was around when it wasn't healthy to be a catholic and neither of them had established views on religion but they held a lot of water and they were very convincing and they were just wonderful to read so

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maybe there's something, I mean, I'd only slip over it but I am probably agnostic, you can't dismiss even that scintilla of possibility, I don't think so.

*You mentioned the possibility of going to Japan, what is it about Japan that attracts you?*

I don't know nothing about it. They have a wonderful language which is all consonants followed by vowels which is very beautiful. It's a culture, I don't know nothing about which is like, I don't really like, I think it quite unsatisfactory going on holidays, you know, you just see things on the surface. I quite like going to live in places and get to know people there and live their way of life, eat their diets you know, do what they do and it's just it's weird place, you know, fantastic diet, lots of fish lovely language, really nice people. It'll just be a change you know and the other side of the world my kids come and see me it would be fun.

*Outside of work have you had any [inaud – interviewer speaks too quietly]?*

Yeah well I read a lot and I think I am really pretty obsessed by music. I listen to lots of music and anything by Beethoven, late Beethoven, by Harry Birtwhistle, Mark-Anthony Turnage's music as well and I suppose we listen to a lot of world music as well, yeah, and my daughter is really into music which is nice, we share our music so we go, we listen to a lot of live music. I quite like, I'm quite into the ephemeral nature of all, a lot of creative acts, hence this as opposed to a painting in the National Gallery. I love the stuff in the National Gallery but I think there's room for this and we listened to too much recorded music. People don't listen to music properly, live music is life. Theatre, I go to the theatre a lot, I mean a lot quite a lot; 30 or 40 times a year about once a week, less of late, obviously but, umm, hence you know there are those ones, occasions you go and you are just bowled over and, yeah, experiences which live with you every day, yeah, again something I might touch on again I suppose, I don't know.

*Have you done anything like this before?*

No.

*You mentioned your daughter is off to Paris, what is she doing there?*

She's teaching. She just finished her degree through the British Council. She applied and they offered her a gig right in the middle of Paris, so.

*What about your son, what does he do?*

He right now he works for the queen, he works, yeah, he's a footman at Buckingham Palace.

*And coming back to the plinth, what would you like to gain from your hour?*

Umm, I don't know really, you know, I would probably be able to tell you afterwards. I think I would like to gain a bit of getting my head together about obviously my wife

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and I'll know afterwards, but I've deliberately not I thought of various things I'd like to talk about, but I [have] deliberately not rehearsed anything so it might last 10 minutes and I might only get half way through which would be awfully sad, so I'll probably end up with a sense of disappointment but I think in the nature of the project that's not a bad thing.

*Have you thought about what you'd like people to get from watching you?*

Well, like I say, I'm not one for performing in front of crowds so I'm glad I've got this graveyard slot. I think I'd feel more of an earnest [?] to perform were I here early afternoon, or whatever, and to be honest people who are going to catch me live, they are either insomniacs or I haven't given them much thought. No I, I can't imagine people staying listening to me too long. People will pick [?], people who know me or Alison or use [?], friends of my kids, friends of ours, they'll watch it out of a sense of duty, I suppose, or out of a sense of curiosity or whatever. I think it's mainly for them and I think, you know, no immediate, the immediate audience I haven't thought about but I'm aware it's part of a project which will be archived so and it sounds awfully bleak when I talk about it, I think hopefully there will be a few things to laugh about and hopefully people will be able to identify with things I say about family. My family is very important to me, yeah, so, and that's what made me. I thought I'd touched on portraiture, umm, can I go on a bit? Really good portraits are the ones that show the character what's under the skin and it's very difficult to do it. Rembrandt is a master at it and in here at the National Portrait Gallery, Holbein's Henry the VIII, fantastic. You know you get a sense who the man is and very few people can do that so people use props rather like literature, people use various conceits of literature for plots in types of works but you know a lot of portraits there will be trappings there would be bits of carpets or sculpture in the background umm the trappings of office to indicate the importance of the person or whatever sometimes it is fascinating like the ambassadors' wonderful pictures. Umm but sometimes it's just, umm, it helps identify the person. I couldn't get up there for an hour and do a verbal self-portrait, I would not impose that on anybody because it would be very dull for me and if it is boring for me, it must be boring for anybody else so my idea is to make a self-portrait by describing my trappings being my family does that make sense? OK.

*Do you have anything else that you'd like to add?*

I don't think so.

*Thank you very much, good luck.*

OK thanks.

**END OF RECORD**