

One & Other Project

Hello my name is Emma and I'm interviewing you on behalf of One & Other. It's the 22nd of September 2009 and it's 6 14 a.m. Can you please tell me your name and date of birth?

My name is Alaisdair Macleod and my date of birth is 15th of November 1977 and I'm originally from Dumfries in Scotland and I'm now living in Warwick.

How do you feel Alasdair?

I'm quite excited, I'm looking forward to going up and showing what I do and maybe make a bit of a full of myself.

How did you find out about the project?

I heard about it in the news and on the media and straight away I thought it was really exciting and as soon as I heard that you could sign up, I went on the website and I signed up. It sounded really exciting and a fun thing to take part in and I didn't really expect to be picked because the odds were against me but I'm pretty excited to be here. I wouldn't miss it.

What was it about it that made you want to take part?

I think it's about everybody taking part in something. Art I think should be a reflection of what's going on, of people, of real people as well as just somebody making something to show. I'm a big fan in taking part in things. I always liked to be a part of something and I think having an art event such as a public art event as this that everybody can take part in and be a part of and play a part with rather than passively standing, watching and commenting, this is something that people can contribute to and that is really exciting to me.

And how did you feel when you found out you had a place?

I was dead chuffed I was really excited. I couldn't believe it at first I thought that if I was going to get a place it would be in the first draw because after that the numbers rocketed, the odds were against me. But I was really excited, there was no question that I wouldn't do it and I was really thrilled to be taking part in it.

What are you going to be doing up there?

My hobby is called live action role playing which is a bit like a cross between medieval re-enactment and table top role playing like Dungeons & Dragons. I normally do it with a lot of more people than just myself but it involves dressing up as a character, choosing a character to play in a certain system, dressing up as that character and then acting out what they could say and do and it's about improvising what they would say. There's not a script or anything like that so I've sort of taken a few characters that I've played in past roles playing games and I've brought some of my costumes along and I'll be playing them out and talking to the crowd as those characters and I haven't read a script but I think I know what they are going to say and what they'll be doing and just trying to show what it is that I do. I'm not really

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hoping to convince anyone to join because it's a bit of a niche activity but I thought it would be a sort of good snapshot of what I am, it's about making things out on the spot it's about bulging things, it's about losing yourself in a fantasy world, it's about self-expression and trying different things and doing different things.

How did you get into it?

I started at university when I was at Durham university there was a *Larp*¹ society up there and I was intrigued and I went along to one of the first events when I first went to university. And I was completely hooked, just something about the taking part about being the centre of things rather than just watching about being able to influence what other people do and really liked the other people that were doing it; they became my groups of friends and my main hobby.

Whereabouts does it take place?

The larger events take place in things like scout camps around the country. So for a weekend maybe somewhere between fifteen and a hundred and fifty people will get together and camp in the scout camp and all play their characters throughout the course of their weekend and there's a group of people who run the event and decide what's happening and they might decide whether, for example, their party is going to be attacked by wars and goblins and things like that might happen over the course of the weekend. Smaller events happen at places like university where maybe a dozen people would go out into the woods and run an event larger events take place in the summer where anything up to two or three thousand people can all be playing the same game at the same time or with their own characters all trying to do different things they've all got different aims and objectives so they've all got this conflict and cooperation and everyone is trying to do the same thing at the same time.

You just mentioned university. Where did you go to university?

Durham.

What did you study there?

I started studying maths and then it became part ... that was really difficult so I switched to computer science which I've been programming since I was ... since I could type, that was a lot easier and I graduated with a 2:2 and have been working as a programmer since then.

What kind of programming?

I programme in C+ and I write. ~At the moment I am writing, working for a company that writes software for driving microscopes fluorescent microscopes using lasers to illuminate, light sources to illuminate things right inside cells, living cells, you can stain different parts of the cells with special proteins that glow under different types of lights. So if you have seen in the news things like glowing jelly fish they use those

¹ A live action role-playing game

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genes, those proteins to bind part of the cell and using microscopy you can see what's happening inside the cell and they glow under different light sources. Our software drives the microscope which takes the images and then reconstructs them in 3D so we can see what's happening in the cell in 3D on the computer screen and see what's happening over time. These cells are usually alive so we can see how the cells are changing over time, it's used a lot in things like cancer research and research and genetic research.

Do you enjoy your job?

Kind of. I enjoy doing something positive. I think it's ... I like talking about it, I like being a part of that, the day to day job I could I can't get too excited about it's something that it's something that I'm quite good at and I can make a living out of but I wouldn't die for my job or anything like that.

You said you've been programming since you could type, what was it about computers that ...

Oh, we've got one of the first time computers there was a BBC micro we had that when I was just four and my dad and my brother wrote some simple programmes together. My brother is a few years older than me and they wrote a simple programme to teach me how to spell so just things like what is the picture on page fifteen of the magazine and I'd type in it's a wheel barrow. Maybe that's a bit advanced for a four year old, it's a cat and so on. And shortly after that I was looking at the programme they were writing in and messing around with them myself so I think I've always grown up with that. I know younger people, certainly my little three year old boy is more proficient on a computer than when I was six, but I think for somebody of my age to have that much contact with computers from a pretty early age is a bit of a watershed. Probably for my sort of age that's becoming normal now.

What kind of childhood did you have?

My dad left us when I was just four and after that it was just my mum looking after myself and my older brother and sister and they went away to school and university when I was about seven. And I was probably quite lonely after that, I mean I was well looked after and everything but it was quite a lonely time until I sort of fled the nest really. I didn't have a lot of friends or people that I got on with in Dumfries so I left to go to Quaker boarding school when I was fifteen and did my A levels there down in Reading and I gained a lot of confidence there that really picked me up and by the time I went to away to university I really sort of found myself a lot more.

Where does the Quaker aspect come into it?

My mum is a Quaker and her dad before her so I've always been brought up as a Quaker really and I can't really call myself a Quaker now. I think I'm technically on the books up in Dumfries still but I don't believe in god, I'm an atheist now, but I do hold a lot of respect for Quakerism and for what they ... for the values that they teach. I think things like the pacifism and seeing there is good in everyone at least if

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not god I think that's a really important part in my life and I've got a lot of respect for the society of friends and for what they do.

If you could describe where you grew up to somebody who's never been there, how would you describe it?

The area I grew up? Dumfries is a market town in quite a rural area it's the only real town for thirty or forty miles. It wasn't a very wealthy place, there's a lot of agriculture around. I grew up on an estate with several other kids on the estate as well, I'm not very fond of Dumfries, I don't think it has a lot to offer. I don't feel a sense of home coming when I go back there any more but the countryside around is very beautiful, it's very agricultural but there's a lot of hills. I like walking in the hills and the coast is quite spectacular as well with the cliffs and a few beaches.

Where do you live now?

I live in Warwick at the moment which is a nice place. Again I don't really feel at home there. I've been living there for eight years but I think I'm only sort of just settling in although I do seem to have acquired two kids and a mortgage so I can't really say I'm not settled. Warwick is a nice place, a nice little town. I think it's quite handy because Leamington Spa is right next door and Leamington Spa has got all the trendy pubs and places where you can go and drink and socialise. Warwick is a lot quieter it has got nice old pubs with real ale and I think the two towns complement each other quite well. I think one of the best thing I can say about Warwick is that it's not very far from anywhere else which isn't a great compliment but it's easy to get up to Birmingham. We like to go up there to do events up in Birmingham and it's fairly easy to come down to London either on the train or just by car and do things in the city.

Could you tell me about your children?

Yes, I've got two kids. I've got a little boy called Owen who's three and a little girl Lydia who's six months and I'm quite proud of my kids. I think they are fantastic. Having two children I didn't expect it, but the relationship between them, I think it really took me by surprise when even at a very early age they sort of really knew each other. They had a relationship outside being in the same house. Owen is definitely Lydia's favourite person in the world; he can make her smile much more than either of her parents. Owen is talking a lot now, he's having real conversations which is quite exciting. I've taken him along to a couple of my live role play events to meet my friends. I made him a little wizard outfit for the gathering in the summer which is a large event and that was great because he was having a real relationship with my friends and with other people. He thought it was fantastic, everybody else was playing the same game as him and he was, as I say, dressed as a wizard and learning how to cast spells and everybody else was playing along. And when you are a three year old and three thousand people are all playing your special game I think that must be quite exciting and he gained a lot of confidence out of that. He's quite an obedient little boy which is good because it means I can trust him a lot. So when we do go away to places, although I do worry that he should be a little bit more rebellious and he should, I'll regret saying that in a few years time I think. Lydia is six

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months, she's just starting eating we did a thing called baby led weaning which I am very proud of. Catherine, my wife, breast fed her exclusively for six months and then started her on real food in the last couple of weeks and she's taking to it like a dog to water. She can eat pretty much anything you put in front of her, not puree, but finger foods and anything she can pick up and eat. We went up for a meal last night with the in laws and she ate quite a lot of pizza so she did quite well.

What is the idea of this specific type of weaning, where did it come from?

My wife read about it on the internet. I think there's a site called mumsnet, there's a lot of belief that it's a good way to help kids sort of moderate their own food intake rather than sort of trying to feed puree with a spoon. From an earlier age if you can keep them going just on breast milk until they are ready to cope with anything, at six months you can eat almost anything. Then at that point they are a lot readier themselves to feed themselves, to decide to stop eating when they are full and it works very well with Owen. He's very healthy little boy, it seems to be going well with Lydia as well.

What about your wife, what is she like?

Oh, she's lovely, she's a real star. She's been really helpful getting me down here and she's very excited about this as well. We met at Durham. she keeps insisting she doesn't do live role play she's just a live role play groupie although she has been to a lot of events as well. She's a very good mother, she's really into doing the best for them in terms of how to feed them and looking after Owen. She's a counsellor at further education college and she lectures in counselling as well.

Do you have any other hobbies besides Larp?

I like getting out in the countryside, I like going for walks in the hills and by the coast and I used to do a bit more when I was younger, I used to do canoeing and sailing and things like that but you haven't got the time these days and you've got, we've got two kids it's enough of an effort to try and take a whole week end out to go away role playing I think that's quite an imposition on my wife as well. I can't push it by doing any more than that.

Have you thought about the future much? Have you got any hopes or ambitions?

Mostly at the moment it centres around my kids and seeing them grow up well, I'd quite like to claw back a bit of personal time and now they are getting older it's easier for us, for both me and Catherine to go away and do things. I suppose nothing particularly ambitious. I'd like to, you know, make my house a bit better and, as I say, see my kids safely settled at school and growing up nicely.

Coming back to the plinth now, is there anything you'd like to gain from the experience?

I'm not sure about that. I'm not sure what I'm going to gain. I think a certain amount of ribbing from my friends and colleagues when they see me dressed up and

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shouting. I suppose I'll gain an experience as something that I can add to what I've done and I guess I'll just gain ... the thing I'll gain will be to be a part of something, being able to say I did that, I was there, I took my turn and I get another string to my bow, I suppose.

Have you thought about what people on the ground ... what you might like them to think when you are up there?

I'll just be pleased if they'll be paying attention at all. I think they might be not quite sure what I'm doing. I think it might quite difficult to understand what it is I'm getting up to, but I don't mind if they are a bit confused. It's not about telling people what I'm doing, it's about taking a turn and doing it in front of people so I think at this time in the morning any casual spectator will just be walking past on their way to work. So they might not really get the whole jist of what I'm up to, but as long as they can look up and see somebody up there doing something that's part of them, I think that's the main thing.

Is anyone watching you today?

Yes, my wife and kids are going to come along and my wife's parents as well. They are staying in a hotel on the South Bank so hopefully they'll be here in time to see me go up and they'll give me a wave and I hope I don't embarrass myself too much in front of the in laws but they know what I'm like so hopefully they'll get over it.

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

No, I'm really looking forward to it and I think it's fantastic that this has been done. I think it's a real unique thing. It has a lot of people talking about it and I'm just looking forward to it, to taking part.

Right, good luck.

Thank you very much.

END OF RECORDING