

One & Other Project

Hello my name is Kate Rowles and I'm interviewing for the Wellcome Trust as you are taking part in Antony Gormley's artwork One & Other. The date today is the 26th of September 2009 and the time is 2.25 a.m. If I can please ask you to say your full name, your age and where you come from?

Hi Kate, my name is Gav Cross, Gavin Cross, I'm 38. I currently live in Liverpool but actually come from London and that's where I've come from today anyway.

And how are you today?

I'm all right, yes, a bit of plinth anxiety but I'm all right.

What are you anxious about, do you think?

Oh it's just height choice the wonderful randomness of what it's all about, reception, austerity who knows.

What was it about this project that you wanted to be a part of?

I thought about this a lot because it's on a good number of levels, one we are big fans of Antony's work, Antony Gormley, like I know him. We know him through his art as I say we live in Merseyside so we've got another place, the installation on Crosby Beach which is fantastic. Whenever people come and visit us we always take them there, very affected by that piece of work and the Field and the Angel of the North. The whole concept so, you know, that kind of triumphalist minimalist egotistical in your face nature of it all, it's quite exciting. That drew me to it, I'm on the Artichoke mailing list as well and again in Liverpool where it was the Capital of Culture last year so we had *La Machine* visit us, *La Principessa*, which was, you know ... my background, I have a background in performance theatre but that was one of the most engaging performance events pieces of art that I was involved with. I got dispensation from Kathy, my wife, to just throw myself into it for the weekend. She was [?] my friend Wendy, her husband was about, we spent the weekend just following *La Principessa* and, in fact, a week later our son was born, Ned. But he still gets referred to by our friends Wendy and Robin as a spider, so yes the Artichoke and I suppose I was aware it was coming, aware of the Fourth Plinth, so bits and pieces like that. It was just very exciting so when the opportunity came through it was a very instinctual thing, yes I'll sign up for that and then you know you get to the moment and here you are.

And when you found out that you had got a place what happened then?

Well it was very exciting because it was the 3rd round of the monthly rounds and I got the email saying I hadn't been selected so I was "Oh, fair enough" because I didn't think I would be and I'd got into it, I'd been watching it and following it and then I got the email a couple of days later and plainly, for some reason, I can't understand 3 am on a Friday night. Saturday morning somebody obviously pulled out, I couldn't imagine why so I got thrown, I was thrown this bone and I said yes that would be a good ... well I phoned Kathy and said, "Look I've been offered it" which was, "Wow, this is the time slot, let's go for it." "Shall we go for it?" So yes we've gone for it.

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And once you've gone for it how did you then decide how you were going to spend your hour?

Well my final decision of how I was going to spend my hour was my first thought. However there was a journey ... there were several options, having watched when I signed up for it, and it was portrayed, this snapshot of life in Britain today, and it was actually a seemingly beautiful simplicity about it which was, you know, an introspective hour. "Just be who you are," the good old British public then get involved with this site, this wonderful randomness of this expectation to do something to be something, you know. I think even if I didn't have that incitement I probably would have still made that choice but, you know, I think from then on the pressure was on really and so they kind of rubbed it in the lime light and well, do I need to do anything? And I have a background in performance so there were options and opportunities there but I had just also consulted with friends through a late one out, we had a night with some friends they came around we eat and we drank and we talked and we picked the idea and then we did some focus thinking around it and then abandoned all that. Keep it relatively simple, maybe not, so it was engaging and people were excited, people were generally excited. I'm excited but when people, when, you know, you drop it in and people are like "Oh" and so I've had a bit of support from friends and through the ubiquitous Facebook and Twitter and embraced that side of it but people will not have made connections with it as well with this little hour.

So how did you decide in the end to spend your hour?

The hour, to describe the hour I'm going to spend the time talking about my son Tom, Tom Cross. Tom died just over 3 years ago and he had very complex disabilities. We had six years of life with Tom, a glorious life of challenge for Tom and for us as a family but a glorious and wonderful time as well and, you know, Tom really impacted on who I am today and for me it was about marking a moment; I knew straight away that the opportunity for this to become an archive. Now I'm going to use a word I don't like, I haven't used, I didn't get my thesaurus out, the notion of marking the moment of memorialising. I don't like that word, I can't think of a better word, it's half past two in the morning anyway. Tom, you know, is gone, we don't have a headstone. Tom's ashes we spread as a family in the River Wye. Tom informs the work that I do and, you know, somebody once said you are only forgotten when someone stops talking about you and, you know, everything is fleeting isn't it? So may be talking about Tom for an hour, but those wonderful statues on Crosby Beach are already rusting and they'll be around for a good long time but they'll be gone in a blink of an eye as will this hour, as will all the other three plinths, King George and the other two, whoever they are, so my son has the right to be on that plinth as well and so I'm going to spend some reflective time, storytelling time, celebrating time as well.

And can I ask you about the things that you've brought with you today.

Yes, well I've got a bin bag, two purposes. One is going to root me for a bit, you know, I'm a big fellow I'm six foot tall, I'm six foot wide, my centre of gravity is low, it's a long drop but also that was Tom's bin bag. His mobility was very impaired so he

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spent a lot of time there; he was very comfortable there, so I brought it with me. I've got a big box which is painted and full of objects and books and lots of pictures and we've got a ... it's all very home spun and that's fine as well for us. We've got a tree which I'm going to clip some things on, it's going to be like my own [?] memoir for me as I clip things on and see where it takes me in the time. I've got some balloons ... on the day of Tom's ... a celebration for Tom, three hundred and fifty friends in beautiful Sefton Park ... we had a celebration event on the day of his funeral and we did release a hundred yellow balloons. Lots of people still talk about that so I brought twenty with me and I might let some go, it's all right; they are bio-degradable as I said. It's just that series of moments for me, you know, either engage with anybody that wants to hear or myself and just talk.

How are you feeling about doing this?

I'm really, really excited and mixed emotions which I always knew it would be. In my job I am a consultant for services for children with disabilities. I use my parental experience, also I've worked for service development as well and I brought the two together so I actually it's part of my job to talk about Tom today and this as well so that has an emotional ... there's an emotional resonance to that. But, as I say, it's about telling stories for the purpose of sharing and learning hopefully, you know. Tom taught me a lot, I think Tom has got lots of lessons for lots of people, still people whose deliverance design, found services for children with disabilities ... have got a lot to learn from what Tom achieved in his short time. So I feel emotionally charged but that's okay, you know. I've got tissues in my pocket and that's okay but I do want to spend the time smiling that's what I want to do and I might take some time out as well.

Would you like to say a bit about what Tom was like?

Tom was fantastic. Tom was a very cheeky, funny boy; very much a very engaging man who would call people into his world and his world was fantastic. It was physically very tough for him, he was ventilated twenty-four hours a day, he needed round the clock awake care in our house and in our life but we worked very hard to try and have as ordinary a life as we could and he brought that. That was his world, he knew no different, he had an amazing charm about it that really engaged me, all of us and, you know, the gift at the time ... the price is high because the time is short but the gift was the time we had which just sustains me so his smile ... as I see the echo of that I have two other children: Libby, Kathy. I have Libby who is four and Ned who's one year old, so I see Tom in them which is a wonderful and sad thing and he's very much part of our life in a living way, in a celebratory way and, you know, it's not something ... this is a very visible public thing and it's a balance, but enough people met Tom and a lot of people who didn't meet Tom have fallen in love with Tom and the pictures that we have from the archive. We have the video that we have and the stories that still echo because of that time so, you know, there's a lot of people who met Tom and I want them to know about him because that's a good thing and they are not going to meet him, they never had the chance but just a little flavour of him I think does you good.

Can I ask what Tom's disability was?

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Yes sure it was a very rare neurological condition. For about three years we didn't have a diagnosis. So it's called SMARD, S, M, A, R, D, 1, spinal muscular atrophy with respiratory distress and at the time it was extraordinarily rare, still very rare now, but it's not identifiable and there's a sadness about that because we didn't know what Tom had, we didn't know what was going to happen, so at the time of those things collapsing he stopped being able to breath for himself at six months. We just happened to catch it and lots of children don't get caught so two o'clock in the afternoon one Saturday we took him to hospital because we were worried. Two in the morning he was ventilated and that could have happened overnight, it could have happened in a different period and we would have never have known and Tom wouldn't have woken up and none would have been the wiser but he was caught so he was ventilated. We knew what was happening, this is an identifiable genetic condition ... all of our children, there's a one in four chance it will happen again if, you know, if Kathy and I have more children, one in four is less than Russian roulette that's one in six so there are many, many families with genetic conditions that have that situation they are in and so we know actually, because people do know the prognosis which is a horrible world, their life expectancy is like this, it's a very life limiting condition for children. That choice to ventilate is probably not going to be offered. So there might not be many children with SMARD1 but that being a genetic condition there's a great opportunity for that to be addressed to be maybe there are some researchers working on it now and this genetic condition may be able to be treatable but, you know, we were in a time frame where the technology was there to support it for the time they had and, you know, it was hard work for him so that time was always going to be short. It wasn't the condition that caused Tom to die, it was just his body; the tiredness and infection and so the time came and that was his time, that was his energy spent and that was always going to happen. None of the other children have this condition, we kind of stepped away from it really, the way that I do services I don't work with families and children. I find that difficult but I do work with managers and designers and commissioners and I use our story to inform those decisions so, you know, Tom is still having a positive impact.

Was it your experience that pushed you in this direction career wise?

Yes, I was a drama teacher and Kathy was a theatre designer and that's the path we were on and then you get taken out of life and you live for fifteen months in a hospital ... we lived in [?] I've gone [?] for less time and then you change life and you are hand to mouth and then for a while you just have to make money somehow, you know. It's a ridiculous percentage: 92% of families who have a child with disabilities will experience some financial hardship, you know, 65% or something definitely 60% will experience poverty because the fact that, you know, I don't mean to be critical, it's a very personal situation because you just are lost and bereft and you work with huge amounts of people. Twenty-eight practitioners working with us at one point, that's a huge tax burden and we could have done with half of that and a quarter of that and we would have had a wonderful life but it's that systemic challenge that families face, you know. They face hardships, grief, pain, emotional drain, financial drain, challenge with services, attitudes, barriers and expect it to do it in a very particular way, you know, you are made to think sometimes you are a burden on society. My son cost the tax payer £175,000 a year and a couple of people would remind us of that, you get that life has a tag and you know these decisions are

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sometimes made and finances ... we couldn't work out what we spent on Tom but he cost a lot of money and for some families you are made to feel like their child is a burden.

And so today who are you doing this for?

Me, the artist is an egotist. I celebrate Mr Gormley's egotism in his casting of himself and placing it out there in the raw form and, you know, as I say, my background is in performance. That concerns me, it worries me that reflectively, you know, I'm sure I'm happy with that but I know the impetus was wanting to be part of the project to use that, Tom, but the first impetus was definitely that public art nature of it, demonstrative part of it. So this is about me now, I have to temper that a bit, my life is here, my friends are here but Tom as well it's, you know, I embrace that.

And can I ask about your background in performance? What performance work have you done?

My background has always been community drama, community practice, I've been very fortunate to maintain that so, you know, from starting new theatre but working in community to being a freelancer. Now this year I had the great privilege to be working for the Liverpool Everyman and I directed a community play in Everyman at the Anastasia, one of my favourite theatres and it was twenty-six community performers between fourteen and eighty-four ... never performed at the level and I never worked at that level from never doing a play to performance, so it's that community practice, it's using the art and theatre to give people that opportunity to just to make the mark and that maintains, you know, as I say, my background is a teacher that's all about performance. Some stand up work, some acting work [?] and education-based theatre but that was never, that has always been a facet, it's never been my career because there's no money in it, you know. It's only a few people who make a living out of the arts these days but, you know, that went with my education experience and when I moved to becoming a primary care manager for children with learning disabilities, and I'm now a freelancer, I still keep that side of me going. So I've got the ... great fun for the Capital of Culture in Liverpool, I was a host for a monthly cabaret where we had established cabaret performance artists and up and coming local artists come together once a month to create art, once a month, on a boat.

And are you still kind of ... in the future do you want to carry on with your performance work?

I think it'll always be there definitely, you know. I've got some aspirations, I've moved to Liverpool twenty years ago. Again I went to the Everyman and I saw a production there and I said to myself I actually want to work here one day. It took me twenty years but, you know what, there's a real catharsis to doing that this year and it gave me the focus for the next couple of years. I'm going to focus on the other side of me developing services for children with disabilities, that's my focus and, you know, in this ... particularly, it's 2009, it's a very challenging year for people. I have great privilege to be able to choose and I've chosen that side for a couple of years and

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who knows? And I can always get the cup out and dance on a corner with the monkey one day.

Can I ask you about where you are from, to talk a bit about your upbringing?

Sure, I was born in South East London in Kidbrooke which is in Greenwich, which is about seven miles East of us here, South East London which is a very intriguing part of London. We just spent time with friends in Muswell Hill driving through North London. As a South East London boy I'm reasonably cosmopolitan that's, you know, that's how South East London was, it's a very strange place and it was as a child so that I had a great upbringing, very typical council estate boy who found youth theatre and decided that, you know, those kids from the big school up the top of the high street, they've got easy. This drama lot is a laugh and got in and, you know, got dragged into that and loved that from that age and took myself to the North West to do a degree in theatre and decided that's where I wanted to ... I always wanted to teach. Where I was, which was Chester, there was a very strong community and educational theatre commitment so I stayed in the North West and say twenty years ago I went to college up there and it's a fantastic place to live and I've lived in Liverpool in 2000 when Tom was taken to [?] and lived there. So my kids are *scousers* but I'm never going to be a *scouse* but, well, I'd like to be but I don't think I'm allowed to be. But my kids are *scousers* and I love living in Liverpool and I was talking about it just driving through London today. I could never see myself back here I'm quite happy where we are.

And who have you got here today?

Kathy Cross is with me, my wife, and I found out today my father in law is here, my brother and sister in law are here, some good friends are coming, people I hardly know are coming, which is wonderful and they are just coming along just to be part of it. It's an event they are not ... they are coming along to support me but they also know they've come along just to support the actual event and I think you know there is something about three o'clock in the morning on a Friday or Saturday morning which people think, you know what? I wouldn't normally do this but I better get another chance coming up. I don't know actually, I've got messages from people I've had lots of messages from people today saying they are going to log on and watch live which is a bit scary but that's lovely just a little bit of support that way is lovely.

What's important to you in your life at the moment, what's happening?

My family, my children, my wife, family is everything. I enjoy my work but we are here to have a nice grown up weekend but actually we are driving straight back to Liverpool. My daughter has suspected flu de jour potentially suspected swine flu very zeitgeist thing to have as a four year old. She's very poorly, she's with granddad, she's fine today so my family are on my mind and that's what keeps me going and that's what it's about isn't?

How would you describe yourself as a person?

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Well, what did I put on the website? Broad and tenacious. I don't know, confident, arrogant, rude, annoying, strident and I'm happy with all of them. I'm all right; I think I get away with it most days.

And have you got any hopes or fears or expectations about your hour today?

Obviously I don't... you know, the fear that I would be exposing Tom to something that is inappropriate. I have no worries about the audience, the hecklers, whatever it is that's their right but just that fear that my performance ego will take over and I will use a story inappropriately. I hope not because I love my son but that's part of it but I'm quite happy to use some moments of stillness and quiet if I need to, you know. I don't have the greatest sense of balance, I have a very low sense of gravity so you know and those nets they look very robust but I'm a big guy so there might slow my fall and I do have the concern of heights but, you know, it's a once in a life time opportunity to get up on that plinth. Have you been on it?

No I haven't. What do you think about this project?

I think it's great. I love it, I love its audacity, I think it's hilarious, I love the way it's evolved. I don't know if Mr Gormley likes it that way but I don't think he'll mind would he? It's a very, I don't know if it's right to say this, it feels very British, it's wonderfully complex and simple and it's ... at the same time it's this beautiful simple idea that suddenly grew. Look at this bureaucracy around here. I've filled more forms today to go on that plinth than I needed to get a mortgage, a very British thing, you know, it's a great concern. I'm going to run a risk I actually want to sneak a pair of scissors on, see if I can away with it, it's dangerous now I've signed a piece of paper.

Are there any closing words that you'd like to say before you go and stand on the Fourth Plinth?

No, I'm fine I've said lots.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.