

One & Other Project

My name is Michelle Owoo and I'm carrying out this interview on behalf of the Wellcome Trust for the One & Other project. The day today is the 26th of September 2009 and the time is now 4.15 p.m. Can you tell me your name, your age and where you come from?

My name's Claire Kelly, I am 40 years old and I'm from Hollywood which is just outside Belfast in Northern Ireland.

And how are you feeling?

I feel ok, feeling, you know, slightly nervous, but I'm all right. I'm grand, fine. I'm looking forward to it, it should be a good crack.

Can you tell me a bit more about where you are from?

Hollywood? Hollywood is St. Mary's Maid really of Northern Ireland and there's probably lots of Miss Marples and very possibly lots of people being poisoned by horse neck and that doesn't really get into the local press if you live in Hollywood you either have to be nine or ninety, there's not really anything for anybody in between and you have to own a dog as well so it's a little bit of a sleepy village where not a lot goes on and [?] get very bored but Belfast is nearby so it's okay, it's bit gossipy my little town.

Where did you grow up?

In Hollywood. I've lived there all my life so I have. My father came from Belfast, my mother came from Hollywood so she said she didn't want to live so he moved to Hollywood and that was 50 years ago, over 50 years ago and... just been there so he has been there ever since.

And where was he before?

He was in Belfast so... I know it doesn't sound very far away but it's a different world really compared to Hollywood. Hollywood is a bit ... it has notions of grandeur I think.

Does it feel like that when you go to Belfast? Does it feel like a different world?

It doesn't. The thing about Belfast, Belfast is great these days the guy grew up during the troubles when Belfast was a little bit wee, a bit like Baghdad looks like now and there's a lot of bother and, you know, my children who are twenty and eighteen don't know that now. And they go into Belfast all the time and they love it, it's an absolutely fantastic city, it's got a great vibe, it's got brilliant shops and brilliant clubs, fantastic hotels and, you know, we've got our own mini gherkin and wheel so it's really, really changed in the last fifteen years. So yes, it's all good, it's a good sign for Northern Ireland that we got a bit of normalisation in our society now.

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And the people you grew up with in Hollywood did they stay in the community?

Sometimes, you know, it depends our family the [?] family is very big. There are six children and then the parents and most of us went away, I didn't go out, I was the only one that didn't go away and travelled like my brother, travelled for a year, my sister lives in Africa, my other sister lived in America so everybody goes away but whenever they want to have children. They end up coming back and they end up settling down there because it's a good place to have a family, because it's a safe place, it's got some nice parks and some nice quiet areas and that's not too bad with traffic so it kind of reminds me a wee bit of Bedford. We've got friends that live in Bedford and in Clapham and it's kind of sleepy, sort of, a wee town in the village feel about it so it's nice enough it's all right.

And what are you going to be doing while you are in London? Spending a bit of time here?

Right, every time I come to London I have an itinerary simply because it's always a whistle stop tour we normally stay a couple of days and then we have to go back because actually we both work and we got quite hectic schedules. So my husband has his own business so we can't really leave it for very long but we have already been around to St. Paul's cathedral we went to St. Martin's at [?]. We are going to see the *Lion King* tonight, we've been on a bus tour, we are going for dinner at a lovely Italian in the West End, we are trying to squeeze in as much as possible. If I could have I would have loved to have gone to Greenwich tomorrow but we just don't have the time because the last time we were over in July and we didn't really get a chance to look over Greenwich because it was actually half five in the evening and everything was closed so we ... there's so many things every time we come to London we say we need to that, we need to do that and then I write them down and we do it the next time around. I love London, London is great it's my spiritual home.

And who have you brought with you today?

I've brought Steven with me, Steven is my husband. We've been together since we were nineteen and now we are forty and we've been married for twenty years. We have three children, Rory who's twenty and the twins Hugo and Laura and they are eighteen and Steven is just Steven, he doesn't say much but he makes sure that I cross the road safely and he's very concerned that I'm going to fall into the net from using that camera so he's giving me all sorts of advice of how to hold the camera test height, you know, and to be very careful with my own personal safety so it's just that kind of guy he's being.

What did he say when he found out that you were taking part in this project?

Totally unsurprised, never really says too much "Oh" I think was the sum total of what he said and "Oh well I'm glad" because he knew that I really wanted to do it and

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when we were over in July I must admit that I hadn't heard that I was getting on to the plinth and I was cursing the people to myself not whenever they were there but I was cursing them "grrrggh", you know, I really want that to be me. So I was really, really delighted and I also knew that if I was coming over here he was going to come out over with me so... good check for him.

Why did you want it to be you?

Why did I want it to be me? Because it's London! Because it's art, because it's freedom of expression, it's creativity, it's everything that I believe in and it's everything that I think that London is, that London gives me that sense of whenever I'm here. One of the brilliant things that I love about coming to London is the anonymity of it like I'm a teacher and I don't get a great deal of anonymity at home. I live in a small village, you know, that kind of thing, and then I come here and you can just, I don't know, you don't have to be anybody, you can just be yourself and the ironic thing is to stand on a plinth in front of, you know, quite a lot of people who are on the ground and there are quite a lot of people who are watching on the internet and perhaps TV... strangely there's a sense of freedom and anonymity in that that I just couldn't possibly think of expressing at home.

When did you first hear about the project?

I was on the BBC website, quite naughtily at home one night, I should have been doing some research or something but I wasn't and it just come up, you know, about the plinth and I knew about the Fourth Plinth anyway from whenever I've been over in Trafalgar Square and I just thought it was brilliant. I thought it was absolutely fantastic and I read an interview with Antony Gormley and I just thought "Yes you know I totally get it, I want to be part of the project," I think it's a brilliant idea, I think it's great for our culture to celebrate its diversity and I just think it's brilliant do you know what? People love watching people and I look at my young children and they are the generation that grew up *Big Brother* and they are just fascinated with watching other people. They've got web cams, you know, they are watching people who they are talking to they just love it they are that kind of ... it's interactive art and that's something that the younger generation is used to and is something that I definitely embrace. I totally embrace everything that is interactive, any form of interactive creativity I think that's the best way for people to learn about people, is to be interactive. We have the screen for *Big Brother*, you can't sometimes ... you'd love to jump in there and say a thing or two to them but you can't whereas here you know we can you know so it's the interactive nature that I'm really delighted with and really attracted me.

Is that something that you bring into your work as a teacher?

Yes absolutely if my classes weren't interactive there would be no point ... people learn better whenever they are part of the learning process themselves and they feel

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as if they are part of the learning process this chalk and talk thing hasn't worked for so long so no... if I use a lot of peer learning whenever I'm teaching other kids who are, you know, helping other kids to learn. So what they are doing is learning, they are using their own language, they are using their own skills, you know, so that they are not necessarily feeling, you know, my heavy hand in their learning but learning is at the centre of everything that I do, interactive learning works. So yes interactivity is very important and another thing it's not new like I'm going to reading some Anglo Saxon poetry today. The Anglo Saxon culture was a public culture so everybody sat around the campfire and everyone told everyone stories because nobody could write anything down so people used to jump into the circle where the fire was and say oh by the way, you know, I can make that story and do some different ... or I challenge that story, you know, you are not from that kin's family, you know, so that whole notion of theatre which is really what we are getting with ... the plinth lent itself very, very well to Anglo Saxon culture and I certainly embrace both for theatre whenever I participate in anything theatrical but also for teaching it's very, very important.

How old are the children that you teach?

My children? My children, why did I call them... my students, they are my children for a couple of years, I teach at a further education college so the kids come down from 16 plus. So in my class at the moment I've got kids that are sixteen up to twenty and I also have a seventy-three year old student in one of my classes so they could be any age... he's doing A level English, he's very sweet.

Is that something that you notice happening more and more often? People returning to study?

Well what we do where I teach, definitely, because our doors are open to everybody. We don't have any age limit so, yes, we've always had older and younger students mixed in together, you know, we have everybody and anybody comes to our college and they are accommodated so you could just have any you know everybody with any ability sitting in your class and what you have to do, you just have to manage that and see what you can come up with. So yes, although I must say older students kind of intimidate me a bit because they know so much, they have so much experience and they are so desperately keen as well to learn. So I do say to them now and again what is it that you want out of the class? The kids that come to the class want to get A levels and want to go on to university or get GCSEs and go get a job, you know, I have to ask them what is it, if it's an interest you might be bored because some are exam based but they seem to be all right.

Can you tell me a bit more about the subject that you teach?

English, I teach English language and English literature, erstwhile history, sometimes politics, sometimes sociology, sometimes anything, I pretty much teach anything. I don't particularly mind because I look at teaching as a skill and that skill can be

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applied to really any subject I can't teach [?] because I'm not so good with the old ... can't do a lesson with 20 per cent off ... I couldn't do physics or anything specialised but there are other things, you know, like arts and humanities I would give it a good go.

Can you tell me about where your affinity with Anglo-Saxon culture started from?

Yes, it started when I was doing my masters at Queens I was an undergraduate in Belfast I took up a module in old English it was then [?] some people might have heard of that and that it was actually the guy that was teaching it, Doctor Hyven Herbertson, and he just enthused me, absolutely enthused me, loved him to bits thought he was great. I use a lot of his teaching skills, I replicate those in my own classroom because he was just such a wonderful teacher and the thing was he was the only person who would lecture. He never trained to be a teacher, it was innate, he was just born with this wonderful skill of this fantastic question technique and a fantastic way of making you feel smarter than what you actually were and he just instilled confidence in all of the students but I'll never forget one time ... whenever I was an undergrad I did save my faith with Anglo-Saxon to do my Masters in it. I went into his room one day and he was translating ancient Greek and Hebrew and I said "Why are you doing that?" And he said, "Because it's there" so, you know, that's just been my motto for teaching. why do it? Well, because it's there just simply because it's there and I think a lot of people get very bogged down with why we have to learn that, do we have to learn that for any particular reason? What am I going to get out of learning that am I going to get this grade? am I going to get that grade, well, sometimes learning is just about learning.

Can you tell me a little bit more about what you brought along with you today?

Yes I brought along two pieces, the first piece is *Genesis Says B* which is Anglo Saxon biblical poetry. Basically what happened was a couple of kind of half destroyed manuscripts were found destroyed a long time ago and editors or academics at the time put it together and created an off cut of the Genesis narrative; it's an Anglo Saxon version so it's very different from "in the beginning," it's more like an eulogy, it reads like a prayer but the sentiment is exactly the same which is that in the beginning God created ... so it follows that story but it just goes by telling it in a different way, the other thing, the antithesis of that which is some Anglo Saxon riddles, the thing about the riddles was they were written by monks and some of the monks were a little bit bored and some of them were a little bit risqué I haven't brought any risqué riddles today because we've got an event going on outside and I don't want to insult anybody but the thing is the Anglo Saxon society one of the things I love about it was that they have you know they had very profound religious beliefs and yet a great sense of sexual humour almost carry on-esque sexual humour so it's fascinating to see the two things fused together.

[00:14:14] *How do you think people will relate to that?*

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I don't know, I don't really know, I'm a bit of a nerd when it comes to things like that you know if I like something I just like it if people don't like it it's *ce la vie*. I've never really spent a great deal of time trying to explain myself but, you know, we'll see. I think considering the find this week of the Anglo Saxon treasure that it gave us, I suppose, a bit of a contemporary edge it will resonate with people in a way that you know who haven't really thought anything about the Anglo Saxon period before that.

Could you expand on that?

Well the thing, well this is really what I really love about the Anglo Saxon period and this is what I really love about the Anglo Saxon language it's available to anybody this random guy who was unemployed and who had a metal detector and went around some field in Surrey somewhere and found loads of treasures, Anglo Saxon treasures beautiful, absolutely beautiful there are chalices made of gold and they were bejewelled and there's jewels. They loved their bling, they really, really loved their bling; they were very like us in that respect they were very [?] in that respect and they really liked to show off so that was a big, big find and the [?] treasure and the wee man has gone to get some money, pounds of whatever for it but what it's done, it has brought to the public consciousness our heritage which is a very colourful heritage which is a very rich heritage in every sense of the world. And I'll be happy today to bring the language forward and for people to listen to it because on a lot of the artefacts you see some of the language that has been printed so I would be interested for some people just to hear how it sounds.

And how does it sound?

It's beautiful, it's really, really beautiful like, for example, the Anglo Saxons absolutely loved compound words, two words that are joined together to make one word so for example if you were familiar with the *Lord of the Rings* middle earth which was one of their compounds they called it middle yearde [?] which is middle and earth but they believed that there was heaven, then earth, then hell, so they were sandwiched between heaven and earth, that's why we were called middle earth that's what they called it another thing is... the body... they didn't just call it the body they called it the bone house that's what they, that's the Anglo Saxon term for it because wherever the was you know war or whatever they could see that the body whenever the skin was opened that there were bones underneath so they knew that it housed bones so they quite literally called it the bone house and that was the body. So they very much called things what they saw, you know, there wasn't ... but their language is so beautiful it's lyrical, it's very, very lyrical. It's extremely poetic and another thing as an English teacher I see so many students who put a lot together as one word, in case they put together as one word I forgive it because I honestly believe it's just them going back to their Anglo Saxon heritage.

Just going back to something you were saying about the monks and their riddles.

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Yes.

Could you give me an example? Can you remember any?

Well, there's one that I've got for today that could possibly ... I was reading it out to my children the other day and it does sound actually a little bit rude and it's about something hard that hangs between a man's legs and it's brassy and it has one objective which is to fill a hole and it's actually a cane. Whenever you think about it it's actually a cane but lots of people don't think that is a cane the monks would have loved that they would have absolutely loved it because that's what they wanted to do they wanted to be able to say to the Abbot that's a cane you have in your hands but at the same time they knew there were people, they knew there were innuendos there, not particularly subtle, but they knew there was innuendo.

That's a very different view of monks, perhaps, than a lot of people would think.

Anglo Saxon monks were very bored, you know they were men like every man and they needed their entertainment and they were very clever they were really people who were religious who were involved in the church were the only ones who had any education in Anglo Saxon society. They had access to parchments, they had access to quills and ink and nobody else had that so you could perhaps call it political abuse of power perhaps.

Have you been to any Anglo Saxon villages?

I have not. Whenever I was researching my Masters at Queen's I asked to go and see all sorts of things and they just told me to go away, so anything, any research that I ever did was all done via the internet or some books or leaflets that people sent me. So no, there was no funding.

And is there any funding now? Are you able to do anything with your children to take them out and about?

No, do you know the great thing is the internet, it's fantastic because they can find anything and because it's an interactive technological resource anyway, you know, we are grand, we are fine and any lessons that I've taken or we are using that I am using in a kind of Anglo Saxon resource is all there it's all grand.

What happened to the treasure that you were talking about?

Apparently it's been given to some museum or it's been donated to some museum and well, there were some kind of very hairy bearded stranger looking academics who were salivating over it in the news during the week so they seem to have taken it and I just presume what they are going to do is to mark it, you know, make sure it's all what do you call that put it in the order, what's it called again?

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Cataloguing?

Yes cataloguing, they are going to catalogue it and put it on display for the public, so... and the wee old farmer who found it, delighted, I bet he's going to buy himself a bungalow. God would love him, it's great.

Just going back to your slot on the plinth.

Yes.

Your slot on the plinth.

Yes.

Do you have any reservations about it at all?

Not really the only reservations that I had were being heard, I suppose, but you know it doesn't really matter.

Are you going to be talking to people on the web?

I'm going to be talking to people on the web and all my family and work colleagues will be listening on there so it should be ok.

Do your students know that you are taking part?

Oh good God yes they do, yes they do, well first of all they were all "What?" So I had to explain to them and then they just thought it was hilarious, absolutely hilarious, so we'll see what happens.

Did you choose three words to go on your profile?

Yes I think ... what was it? Mad was probably one of them, slightly mad; I'm a nerd as well.

In what sense?

In that if I really, really like something I would just pursue it to death irrespective of what everybody else thinks or irrespective of the benefits that it could probably have for me. What else? Passionate, somebody called me passionate in work and I think you know... probably she meant she never shuts up, she probably did, it's not what I called her to anyone but anyway.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

No, just thanks for having me I think it's great, I think it's brilliant, I'm delighted,

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delighted to be here, sorry I've got sun burn. I'm roasted to stand on top of some pole to go, "Wow isn't this great?"

Are you looking forward to it now?

Yes, I am yes, it's all good.

Thank you very much indeed.

Okay, no probs.