

One & Other Project

Hello my name is Emma, I'm interviewing you on behalf of the Wellcome Trust and One & Other, it's the 12th of September 2009 and it's 5.19 a.m. Can I please ask you to say your full name, your date of birth and where you come from?

I'm Sarah Evans and my date of birth is the 7th of March 1960 and I come from [?] in Hertfordshire.

How do you feel?

I'm feeling a bit anxious, getting up early in the morning and coming to go on the plinth, I had to ... my daughter woke me up, I had to come here with my daughter and my other daughter should be home, she just got a new puppy so I had to, she wasn't, she was absolutely determined she wasn't going to come down here. She's twelve and she didn't want me to have anything to do with this mad thing, you know, eccentric mother thing, so she managed to find a friend with a step dad in London to invite her for a sleep over so she disappeared at 6.30 p.m. last night so this poor puppy was woken up at 2.30 in the morning by all of us going out, all on his own, in my daughter's bedroom thinking, you know, missing her so she was howling, what do I do? Do I leave the howling dog? I left the howling dog. I thought if I went up there I would never get away and we got down here okay, we managed to get lost down in the back streets in Bond Street and parked the car and used the Sat Nav to get here and my daughter helped me carry my bag across the square, my older daughter, she is quite excited because she did art in GCSE and she thinks it's cool but it is quite worrying, I'm sure everyone says the same, apprehension, what's going to happen.

How did you hear about the project?

I went in the wrong entrance, I got lost in the National Gallery because me and my daughters like going into the portrait National gallery if we are ever in this part of London. We're used to going because my daughter that is here is really into ballet when she was little because I am a bit of a chaotic mother and she really likes routine and she loved the ballet teacher. So for half an hour a week she would exactly know what was going to happen, do the same exercises, she really got into ballet and we used to go and see the portraits of Darcy Bussell as we got older and kept going to the National Portrait Gallery, we would find lovely things like a video of David Beckham sleeping. Anyway hanging around there and we got lost in the National Gallery, we found the short lists of the plinth so there was, this was fantastic so I thought if that doesn't win I would be sad. It also said that anyone can enter so if it happens I want to make sure I'm there, self important, I don't mind showing off, but we really liked Tracy Emin's meerkats, I heard Ken Livingstone on one of the interviews on [?] programme. If there was a public vote meerkats would have won so that's how I heard about it and I heard about it on the Arches, I knew it was coming up and I manage to put my name down before it finished and got picked out on the next round, I was very lucky, or unlucky, whatever.

And what made you want to take part?

Just because they wanted ordinary people and I wanted to be represented, I suppose I would be a working mum and you sort of feel as if when you are a mother

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or a housewife at home embroiled in domesticity that you are hidden, people don't acknowledge the work you are doing. People around you that you do it for don't acknowledge you are doing it let alone the wider world so I wanted to do something about being a working mum I thought I should be represented on the plinth and I am getting older and I wanted people of my age doing it, I suppose there are not many older people are there?

What are you going to do up there?

I am taking my stethoscope and my ironing, I was thinking, because I know you've had people up there ironing, I was thinking then I realised that I wanted to make a portrait of myself so I've got a pile of books to put up there that I keep on my shelves, the kind of Bridget Jones books and how to do things, you know, how to get on in life and I've got a picture of my kids and a picture of my step kids because I'm getting married in March and I've got my keys, my mobile. So I wanted to put things around me that represented my life somehow then I realised I had to do something, so I am going to fold and refold the washing and when I was in [?] before my partner died, my kids' father died, we had a holiday in Croatia near [?]. It has a yacht kind of place and it has an arts festival, obviously quite a good art festival, because it is quite a mannered sort of place because it has these yacht visitors. It is quite buzzy, it has this lovely cathedral at the top of the hill with cobbled streets going up and there was this woman at the top sewing, she had a pile of old clothes which was meant to represent people dead in the war I think and as she went on she was sewing the, hmm, clothes, she is cutting bits and sewing on the patches doing a patch work carpet which as you walk down the street you met this piece of cloth that was coming towards you and as it got further and further down as they walked down the hill to the cathedral which is the centre of this arts fair she let people choose the next piece of patchwork to put into the thing so my kids got involved in helping her choose the next piece of cloth so that was very cool so when I've been watching people on the plinth it's really nice having a physical way of communicating physically with the crowd I've seen people throw sweets and so and so and they go in the Clive Alan interviews some of them they would say it would be good to throw sweets and the woman who had a tent was throwing paper aeroplanes and then I saw a woman for the [?] making paper planes and then I developed my idea of the paper ironing and doing this activity and doing a sort of rope, sewing something that could go onto the Square, I don't know if it would get out there and also there's the idea of being stuck at home like a damsel in her tower with making a point of all the domestic tasks that I'll be doing and then I brought something to talk about because you've got ... when I realised that you'd have a radio mic so I've got some little funny stories, stories about family life, my friend said take descriptions from men, so I've got these things that are props for people that are actually listening and need entertainments while they got their computer on, it'll give me something to do, so that's sort of my outline plan of what I'm going to do.

What's home life like for you at the moment?

It's quite good because of the wedding next year, we had the engagement party and that was fantastic, we had a really lovely day, my hairdresser is the secretary of Little Village cricket club and so we had a barbecue at his cricket club, a curry from the

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local curry house, the [?] Barge - if anyone listens, plug the curry house. But yes, so David my new bloke moved in a year ago so the children have gone used to being around the house but because both of us had partners that died, my partner died by suicide four years ago and his partner died from cancer four years ago, it throws a lot of stuff up for the kids and him just being there because the kids miss their dad really and, and, then he sold his house and moved his furniture in June, July, a couple of months ago and so they felt even more their territory was being changed and invaded and his kids are older but yes the fact that we are going to get married and that we were going to have this engagement party you know reminds them that I'm not their mum and their mum had really gone so they sort of have the issue and my mother in law is staying this week [chuckles] mothers in law have this way of letting you know how they feel almost as much as what they don't say with what they say and the kids have finally gone back to school and mother in law comes and I can't get to catch up with my jobs but yes it's all right the kids are settling in with David and he's fantastic and when you are about to get married you feel very optimistic about the future and it's all good.

Where did you meet David?

On match.com, yes, he did physics at University, he's an environmental officer. In fact he had to inspect Antony Gormley's house once so we have another connection with Antony Gormley but yes and we were twenty-three out of twenty-four matches on match.com so it works, whatever magic they use to do it, so that was good. Internet dating is a bit of an up and down kind of affair, you feel as if you are putting yourself through it but yes, I thought I wanted to be with someone and yes, it worked out really well for us, so far.

So you hit it off straight way?

On and off, we did the first day, we got on quite well. I was bit late, the arrangement for the meeting was not great but yes, we did get on very well on the first date and because, you know, I said my husband had died, and how did he die? So my friend said, what are you going to tell people on the first date? Because my husband died by suicide, my partner died by suicide, you can't tell people, but I did and I said he died by suicide because I wanted to divorce and that enabled him to tell me all his stuff about how his marriage wasn't very good so we put all this stuff on the table on the first date so you kind of think, oh you wouldn't say that. The second date was a complete disaster so we almost stopped seeing each other and I had a holiday and I got back in touch with him and we went out a few times. I suppose it probably took, we emailed each other probably one and a half a months or two months when we met and then three months of these sorts of dates before we were going out, we made a go at it, it wasn't a sort of straight process.

What are the plans for the wedding?

We are going to ... his dad has really, really bad Parkinson's disease, I've had my previous father in law though I wasn't married but all these mothers in law and sisters in law without being married which is great. But when I finally get married I will finally get out of it but yes, he was really locked in like the butterfly and the driving bell his

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Parkinson's was so bad he could hardly talk, he was ever so good natured he would smile but how much he knew what was going on you couldn't gauge and he's been cared for at home from five carers a day and spells in hospitals. Although we knew he wouldn't live very long, we couldn't have a wedding without including him and we wanted him to come, or at least his wife to come, so we decided we had to get married in Yorkshire where they lived, South Yorkshire. So David found Wortley Hall because he's a Yorkshire man he's very careful with his money and Wortley Hall is a sort of nice big country house run by the coop so it's not sort of enormous for weddings and funerals like big affairs but sort of more reasonable ... it's very comfy, it's a bit like ... I went to a conference in Cumberland House in Winter Park, it's like the Queen Mother's old house. It hasn't really, it's all whicker stairs and carpets and floorboards that creep and windows that don't quite close, it's all kind of faded grandeur rather than spunky new very comfortable. It has forty-seven bedrooms so, because they have farm men conferences there every year, it's run by the trade unions, it's slightly bureaucratic but it's got the basics, we had a nice meal there and we went there for his mum's eightieth birthday and the meal was a little bit dodgy so it was like, wait and see. But yes they've got space for eighty people and we've invited one hundred and ten so it'll either be a squash or presumably not everyone will come but yes, I'm looking forward to that.

What kind of things do you like to do together?

Well, we have to look after the kids, there's not much room to do things together. We like to go away for weekends, I just bought a holiday flat in [?] with my husband, sort of pension, and we like to spend time there. I like taking the dog for a walk, he likes going to the cinema, we love going around looking around the town, going to the museum that sort of thing, we do like the same sort of thing, we are planning to take up gold, we're planning to go to Centre Parcs on holiday. My holiday this year was five days in Centre Parcs and one week at the flat in [?] with my children and four other teenagers without David and then we had a holiday in Barcelona which I suppose we chose, well my youngest daughter likes it there but in Centre Parcs we did something new every day. It was really good, we did sail boarding which we'd only done once or twice before years and years ago, we had a lesson in gold which was completely new which was quite fun and then I wanted to do the high ropes because we've got this thing near us called Go Ape which is fantastic because I don't really like going to theme parks on the rides with my kids, I don't see the point of it but going on to the trees in the woods is just fantastic, you know, you are safe and you have to work quite hard to go on and then you go down these high wires it's just fantastic so I've been on Go Ape twice with my daughter and I thought it would be, because [?] was coming to Centre Parcs but we went on the high ropes and it was awful it was just terrible you had this pole that was thirty feet high you had to climb on to it and then you had to oust yourself up to the little platform at the top and then jump onto a trapeze it was just mad, it was just mad, and then, my daughter has done this before on school trips and things, and then the three of us had to climb up the pole and oust herself on something smaller than this place, one foot square, a

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platform at the top and the three of us had to stand there put our feet on it and hold on to each other and lean out and that's what you were supposed to do and we just all, we did all manage to get our feet at the top of this thing, it was just amazing, mad, you just feel like why am I doing this, very challenging, I suppose it pushed your comfort zone, it was something new we did at Centre Parcs, yes.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Kent. I was born in Hounslow. My mum had to get married, she is always very ashamed that she had to get married, my dad was a medical student and my mum's dad was a builder, she lived in Hounslow and her mum and dad, she had two older sisters, one nine years older, one fifteen years older than her. She was born at the outbreak or war more like two days before, she was seventy a week ago and I think the outbreak of war was seven days ago, two days before that of something and there were constantly people in the house. They had a lovely pianola and they were the first family in the road to get a telly and her father had been in the 1st world war and gassed and they had business around Shepherd's Bush and he and his brother were put in a home by their stepmother for part of their childhood and when he was sixteen or seventeen, because he was a big bloke, he would get given white feathers, so he joined up early and he was young so the sergeant major looked after him and tried to keep him away from the front line but he did get gassed and his brother, the three bothers survived the war and started the business in Sheppard Bush he was a plasterer and he plastered one of the statues in the mall which used to have this statue and he had, weirdly he had a business relationship with builders in Austria because my mother had a pen friend through his business associates and when me and my daughter were sixteen and seventeen, me and my sister, we got shipped off to do an exchange with this family in Saltsburg that had built five houses around. My mother had gone out there in a summer house by a lake and then he built, the builder who knew my granddad, built five houses for him and his four children so these four families were living around the lake, it was fantastic. So I grew up, I was born in Hounslow and then my dad got a job in Kent so I grew up in Kent, went to school and lived in Hillsborough. I had three bothers and sisters, my brother is a fantastic ... well my sister, it's lovely coming from a big family, my brother came to see me yesterday to give me a desk, he said he was going to come along today but my dad's dog died, one of my dad's dogs had some sort of event yesterday and couldn't get up so my brother went over and decided whether he'd be put down because my mum and dad were away.

How would you describe your childhood?

Yes, it was okay, it was busy because ... we got swine flu going on at the moment, my dad retired a couple of years ago, he was a GP and I remember the two influenzas we had in the '60s he was ... just worked off his feet he really was, the way we are organizing ourselves now he works so hard and my mum used to answer the phone, having these four kids who were quite young. She was twenty when she had me and yes but, you know, they were always tight for money but they sent us to

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private school because they thought they should I don't know it was comfortable and happy really, they are very good, when my husband Jonathan died they were fantastic because my dad's dad died in the war when he was about three or four his dad was, hmm, given the option of driving fire engines in the blitz in London or going to train to be a pilot or to fly aeroplanes and he died training to fly aeroplanes in Derbyshire so that was bad luck and so, oh yes, so my dad was fantastic he's just sort of picked me and my girls up and just sort of took me to the house for a bit and just made me get up and have a meal talk lightly with people, get on with it, keep the routine of life going, what you have to do when you don't let yourself, you don't have a chance to think, to give yourself, you want to go to bed for a week and not talk to anybody but when you've got kids you can't do that and yes we got through it, with lots of help we had, we've done the [?] bereavement group with the children, we've been to Winston where they do a suicide group which is fantastic and before we did that we did a local bereavement group with children as well which was in Luton which was very helpful and Wave, there's another organisation called Wave for young adults and but and there were a fair number of people with kids so it was really helpful for the kids to meet with others who didn't feel sorry for them, yes, it was all very useful.

What does an average bereavement group entail?

An average bereavement group entail?

Yes.

It's a kind of, sort of very structured teaching you about bereavement and I think probably the woman at Winston researched bereavement and used a Churchill Scholarship to go to America to research bereavement group children and you just learn about bereavement you tell your story to the group you, you, you talk about the anger, you use some exercises to talk about the anger, the sadness and the guilt that makes feelings and you throw clay at a wall and you let balloons off and you light candles and make a memory box and the children get taken off in one group and then the adults have a facilitated group so you get a chance to talk about the other adults and honestly the Winston group was so exciting the Chepstow [?] was so fantastically mixed because it was based in Luton there were one or two nice comfortable families the parents had been happily married and one of the parent had died by cancer and otherwise it was a motorbike accidents and drugs and massacres in Rwanda and blah, blah, blah. It was like lorry drivers all kinds and people who had been brought up by their granddad and their granddad had died and there were much more mixed families situation, yes, the kids found it very helpful.

How do you think the experience affected you as a family?

Yes, I think it's affected the teenage children. My youngest was seven when he died, she's twelve now and she just sits on the sofa, it's very frustrating, she's very quiet and withdrawn, me and her older sister are very verbal and her way is to just make her own kind of world and I think we just have to be glad she goes to school rather than saying why don't you do this? At least four days a week she generally goes to school so that's like pretty good whereas my seventeen year old is beginning to turn

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a corner and beginning to feel happy. She feels she's been robbed of her early teenage life, the relationships of the children are at a bit of a distance they've got friendships groups but there's an extent to which they feel there's something that they've been through that other children find difficult to be aware of so there's a sort of stuff that doesn't get talked about to some extent or needs to be skirted around but yes, and as a family, I can't take it for granted that kids are going to do things with me. I think that's part of being a single parent and also the first year or two after bereavement you don't function properly so everything goes to pots, everything gets thrown up into the air and the fact that with suicide there's probably been difficulties before that's what you find in the groups, the fact we hadn't had a very happy family life before and her dad had been quite bossy and difficult at times him and I hadn't got on and it's changed the dynamics of the family, you need to deal with the legacy so there's all sorts of stuff as well so it's affected us so it's part of where we are really.

Looking into the future, do you have any hopes or expectations?

I'm glad I'm doing this and I am getting married and I am really hopeful that me and David will be having a few good years, he's diabetic and so he's always anxious he's not going to live that long but I mean he's well, he's got any chance that anybody has. I work at the hospice so I regularly see people who got married last year and now they've got ... they're dying but no, I want to make the best of my life with him, I want to get the kids up and then enjoy my free time a bit more. My priority is giving some time to something, it's very difficult, I'm very easily persuaded to look after other people and you know I went to get a suitcase for my ex husband, my dead husband's cousin from Australia, a very easy kind of ... I feel guilty, my mother in law made me feel guilty that I'm not, that it takes me so long to see her and in all of that the children can get lost a bit so I suppose my priority is to make sure I get quality time with my kids and then I've taken up yoga. I don't know what I want to do as a second career ... teach yoga, yes.

How long have you worked in the hospice?

When Heather was two, I was doing public health medicine. I didn't like the way it fitted in with family life and it didn't suit me, I'm not a great communicator, persuader or manager and so I went back, I decided to go back to clinical medicine and I worked in the hospice so that was ... [inaudible] months and then luckily this GP job I got, we call in the hospice because I've had that 6 months experience it's been very easy to pick that up so I only do, now I do about 3 or 4 week ends a year but it's nice, I really enjoy doing it.

Did it teach you anything about death?

Sorry?

As far as working in a hospital is concerned.

Oh was it hard? Yes, well for my point of view as a doctor it's not very hard because what you have to do is manage the symptoms. It's like being a mechanic, people

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have very definite illnesses it's like in general practices that people come across all kinds of things but they have pain or sickness or nausea or constipation or other particular you know and there's a sort of sequence of drugs you can use to tackle that. So I really like the problem solving so I do get, I can look someone in the eyes and acknowledge someone is dying and I can talk to their relatives and the others. I see that more of a nurse's role in the hospice and I don't know how they do it, I think it must very hard day in and day out, the nurses get a lot closer to patients. As a doctor I keep a nice safe distance and it's very topical because my stepdaughter is doing exactly that having nursed her mum with cancer and she gave up a year after her art degree to come home and look after her mother and when her mother wasn't sleeping at night it was Sarah that went into her room to keep her company, they were going to work and she really admired the Macmillan nurse. It gave her a sort of idea of what she wants to do so she's just finished her nurse's training and loved her hospice attachment and did six months of non-hospice work just to give a feedback on the ground, she's decided to wants to go she's got a job back at the hospice so she wants to stay there, I do kind of understand I think it will be hard for her but it will, it's a very satisfying environment to work in because the nurses are properly resourced and they can you know give proper attention to the people and once you get used to the fact the people aren't getting better and I think it must just make you deal with your losses but yes, as a kind of popping in now and again, it is difficult.

Going back to the plinth, is there anything you'd like to gain from your time up there?

I suppose it is going to be an interesting experience. I hope I pull it off and I don't make an idiot of myself and I suppose I want to sort of feel I've done something that isn't too dark but I suppose I want to feel like I've been up there and I've represented myself, yes.

Have you got anything else you'd like to add?

No, thank you very much for all that time, thank you!