One & Other Project

My name is Verusca Calabria and I am here today to interview Trixi Blair on the 7th of July 2010 on behalf of the Wellcome Trust, and we are really here to discuss your time on the plinth, Trixi.

Right, fine.

So, thank you very much for coming today. So I wanted to remind you about your performance on the plinth, I know you went up there to talk about ageism. I have listened to your pre-plinth interview and I have some questions to ask you about your life story. But first of all what has it been like since you've been on the plinth, how do you remember the event?

Very exciting, it was at four in the morning, so it wasn't the best time of the day because it was pitch dark being October the 4th, but it does stand out in my memory because I am not good with dates but October the 4th I will never forget. And I had my family with me; they all came up for the event and also one friend. Otherwise there was not much of an audience, but it didn't matter. There were a few people; I think there was one particular person who was there for everybody every night. And it was, I remember as being very exciting and all my friends and family were very excited for me and lots of people have looked at the website since and wrote comments and it was very memorable.

And are we talking about the "One & Other" website here?

Yes, we are.

So how many comments did you get?

Oh, probably not as many as lots of other people, but I would say about fifteen that I can remember. I haven't looked recently if there has been any more. And there are lots of other people who, you know, viewed the website and actually looked at the whole hour but didn't try to comment. And there are people still asking me now you know, 'What was it like?' 'Can you send me the link?' I haven't checked for a month or so whether it is still there but, so I don't know. Is it still there the website? Yes, so you can still look at it. Yes, very exciting, I was very pleased and lots of people. The citizen's advice bureau where I volunteer thought it was a fantastic thing to do and mentioned it in their newsletter. And we are members of a Liberal Jew Synagogue and they were delighted for me, you know, very interested in it. And have made me do other projects as an outcome of this about other people for the community there. So it's the only thing that I have ever done where I have been a so called 'activist', you know, I think it's probably because I am old

now, that I… I didn't mind doing it. And lots of people said 'how did you dare?' But I think there's a little side of me that's an exhibitionist I quite enjoyed being over there.

So why this topic of ageism, when did you begin to have an interest?

Back the later part of the 1970s, we lived up in Keele in Staffordshire and I had done research. Actually it's earlier, I had done research in the '70s for the London School of Economics on an organisation called Taskforce which was voluntary information at the time which put young people in touch with older people and I was part of a team that was evaluating the effectiveness of Taskforce. So, probably that was my first contact with older people and then, when we moved up to Keele in Staffordshire, by chance I came in contact with this charitable organisation called the Best Johnson Foundation and I got the post of Research Officer there. And we ran lots of conferences and discussions on improving the quality of life of older people. And as a result of that, I started lecturing, well, as a tutor councillor for the Open University on a course called 'The Ageing population' and I did that for a few years. And then, I became a teacher and then my interest for older people stopped if you like. I wasn't doing anything about it. But now that I have reached that age myself again I am obviously very interested in it from a personal point of view. And when I came across this lecture by Julia Neuberger, I thought, she said in the lecture and in her book, exactly what I had always felt about ageing, so when I got the opportunity to stand on the plinth, it was the theme of ageism was about one of two or three things I'd thought about. And then I decided I would focus on ageism whilst I stood on the plinth.

Just to summarise, what were the things that resonated with what Julian, this writer, was saying about ageism.

Well, she thought that, and I agree, I always thought this, that the reason why older people were not treated so well in society and why there was a lot of discrimination against older people was because there was never any self-help movement in this country. So, whereas in America there was the grey panthers movement back in the '70s we've never had an equivalent over here. And I always thought that was to do with the social class differences but I could be totally wrong. I see that from the point of view of a sociologist which subject I lectured in for over twenty years, that may be it's to do with the fact that in… I do think the UK is a very class-ridden society, and I think … older people who are middle-class are okay. So they've got no reason to form a self-help group, and the other people who are very disadvantaged are

probably those who are less affluent and have less money and therefore probably have… the less…not so much potential self-confidence to form self-help groups for themselves. And so I think that's one key reason why there is more ageism here perhaps than in other countries, because although there are very effective organisations like Help the Aged then Age Concern which is now Age UK. I think it is different to have an organisation acting for, you know, on behalf of people rather than a particular group acting on behalf of itself. So, when I stood on the plinth I really thought, may be we should have such a self-help organisation, but it needs a champion and it seems that nobody wants to be this champion [laugh] so it lacks a leadership figure.

Going back to the experience on the plinth, since we interviewed you before you went up, we don't know what it was like when you were up there, and soon after when you came down, do you remember how you were feeling?

Up there? Up there I felt really frustrated because I had prepared what I wanted to say really carefully and I had rehearsed it at home with Eric my husband. I stood on the garden table in the garden, with my props, and I declaimed everything to him. And we did think that it could be raining at the time when I was actually on the plinth. So, all my props like my … I had laminated sheets with the ten points in Julia Neuberger's book with things like, saying that 'Stop ageism at work' so we had it laminated so if it rained [laugh] it would not be affected, but what we had not thought of that it could be very windy, so whilst I was up there all my props [laugh] were blowing away the whole time. So I remember running after these props that, you know, the wind was blowing in different directions. So, that was my main frustration up there. And I was so keen to deliver what I had to deliver up there, that I didn't really spend any time enjoying being up there and in the end I ran out of time so I had to garble the rest of what I wanted to say. But it wasn't so I wasn't scared of being up there, it was lovely to be up there, but I was focused on delivering my message and so It was a little bit frustrating when the wind was so strong.

Talking about he project as a whole, did you follow it as you went along?

Yes I did. Yes. Before it and after it as well. I spent a lot of time looking at people before me and what they had said and I used to look at the weekly summary of the most interesting … slots that people had done, I used to think some of them are wonderfully summarised and used to have great fun watching them especially the ones who were streaking, those were hilarious, great fun, really very, very entertaining and very special to be part of such a project.

Do you think having an on-line community following this project and participating in a way by making comments on people's profile had an effect on what you chose to do?

You mean afterwards or beforehand?

Before.

Before. I don't think so, no, no. I mean, I did look at what other people had done, but I don't think it influenced my choice of topic for when I was up there.

Did you participate in this on-line community in terms of making comments on other profiles?

No, …because I am … I am not that IT orientated. You know, I can do what I need to do but I am not… part of any IT community at all. So I now use, well, obviously I use email. I am on Facebook because my son-in-law put me on there, but I am not into online community at all. I am too old.

Were you aware that there were a couple of virtual communities of the plinthers on Twitter and Facebook?

No, No, I had no idea. No. I think that's fantastic outcome. Really is interesting.

Okay. Just now to move towards the experience as a whole. What do you think was the impact for you on a personal level?

I think it's given me a lot of self-confidence to feel that was something I was able to do. I am not good at speaking in public, so it may have helped me that it was at four in the morning and I knew there was nobody there. But nevertheless, the fact that I applied to do it, I got it and I went through with it and I prepared for it, has given me a lot of self-confidence that I hadn't had before.

Do you think it changed you then in any fundamental way?

No, no. I couldn't claim that it's changed me fundamentally, but it has empowered me, yes, I think it was an empowering experience, yes. I am not afraid of speaking out, now. I think it is partly to do with ageing anyway but it is also the experience of having done it. I know I did it. So it was, it was very good. Very grateful for the opportunity.

To bring you back to your life story, as you mentioned to us that you and your family were refugees from the 1956 Hungarian revolution, I know you've said to my colleague in the previous interview that you didn't know really what was going was going on at the time. Because of course, your parents didn't feel comfortable to tell you about the repression and so on. I wonder at what point did your parents explained to you what had happened and what story they passed out to you?

They never did. [And I think that's had a very lasting impact on me. They were not child-centred. I think probably many parents at the time were not child-centred and I actually remember because my father reminded me that one of the question I asked on the way to England: 'Are we coming to England because we are going to have more money here?' And he just laughed. I think he laughed because he didn't understand why I should be concerned about it at all. He didn't really understand that I would need to know, why we were coming here, because he knew why he was coming here he thought it was self-understood, whereas I never understood. Because, I am not sure whether I mentioned this in my previous interview, in Hungary, this was during the communist's time, during the Russian occupation, we were taught that England was an awful country to come to, because it was, there were always strikes there, workers were exploited, so I could not understand why on earth would you like to come to a place like that. And my father, and I suppose my mum as well, in just… because they knew why they were coming, they didn't, it didn't occur to them that it would have needed to explain why we were coming.

During the revolution, in '56, do you recall any memory of that time yourself?

Oh, very clear memory, very, very clear memories. I mean, first memory was of … apparently a teacher escorted me home the day that the revolution broke up from school that was the 23rd of October 1956. And then, I remember that we had to stay home, it was too dangerous to stay outside, we had… we lived in the 3rd floor of an apartment block bang in the middle of Budapest and there was a cellar and we went down to the cellar to make sure that if need be we could go down there and stay there. My grandmother had a brown… big brown box and I never knew what was in it but she actually opened it up. And, yes, I still sometime think about it today. She had in tins of food, which either had been since the Second World War or may be what perhaps relatives had sent to Hungary from America, I don't know, but it was provisions there in case there was no food available.

And then, one day, I mean a few days later, the tanks came rolling down our street and we were up in the flat and my parents must have said, 'just lie flat on your tummy' and we all just laid flat on our tummies because they were shooting into the houses. But, luckily when they passed our house they only shot with the machine guns not actually with the tank. And so there were lots and lots of holes, machine gun holes in the wall but none actually got into our flat. That's the worst moment that I can remember.

And then I can remember eventually that we were allowed out of the house and I can remember crossing the road and going passed a Russian soldier who said, shouted at "Davei Davei". That is the only Russian word I know which is "go away".

And then eventually when we went for walks, you could see the, you know … so many parts of Budapest, just crumbled and houses shattered, and I mean what was very memorable, that people were buried in parks. Anyone who was killed, was buried there and then in the park and a little wooden cross was there. But, luckily I don't know anyone, did not know anyone personally who was killed. Although I do … we had a maid and the maid's son died fighting in this revolution. So … that did have an enormous impact. I remember it clearly still now.

And I think my parents thought straight away about escaping and loads of Hungarians were escaping then. And they had, they never told about it to me, because they never talked to me about anything I think because they were scared that I would tell other people at school. So all I knew was that one night we had packed some suitcases and my mum had a rucksack in which they had cut two holes for my sister, because she was so little. But she was put in the rucksack. Yes, two legs dangling out. And, just as we were due to leave, because we agreed to escape through the border and the Russians were there already. We had heard that the particular route that we were going to take had been discovered so we couldn't leave then. So we left about a month or so later, because my father had a passport to visit West, Western Europe. He had been out the year before. And I think he paid someone to write my mum's name and our two names into his passport and we were allowed a sort of 'holiday' in inverted comma, to Vienna. So we left Hungary with about three of four suitcases, they did bring out my bike, I don't know why. And we had, just had to leave the whole flat, a very beautiful flat as I recall it, everything in it. And go.

And so we arrived to Vienna I think on the 19th of January 1957 and my parents had friends in Vienna and they must have booked us a room in a hotel because the next thing I remember is that the first day we were there, I had no idea what was going on. My parents went out because I think they had to register somewhere as refuges. But they did not tell me that, they left me there in the hotel room with my sister. And they didn't come back, and they didn't come back and they didn't come back. And then a waiter brought us some food around lunchtime, and I'd have no idea what was going on. And eventually my parents turned up in the evening and I think it is because they had to queue for a long time. But I just remember this feeling of being forlorn you know in a strange place. I couldn't speak the language. And I didn't know what was going on.

And that sort of … well, I'd been used to that experience back in Hungary cause they never told me anything and it kept repeating itself. So the effect for that has been, is that I am insecure incredibly insecure caused by experiences like that.

You mentioned in the previous interview that you lived with your family in a refugee camp in Vienna for a few months…

Yes, it wasn't in Vienna. What happened was that my father, who was a lawyer in Hungary, got a job in an office through some friends, that we had, or relatives. But we had no money, absolutely no money, because we couldn't bring anything out. So it was thought that it was best for my mum, myself and my sister to go and stay in a refugee camp, and this refugee camp was in a very beautiful place outside Vienna, in an area… Well, the place was called Bad Kreuzen and I was… as I was sort ten and a half, I thought this was a wonderful place, because it was up in the mountains, it was a hotel that had been converted by the Swedish Red Cross to a refugee camp and there were lots of young kids. I mean, the accommodation wasn't nice because in the hotel rooms they had put bunk beds and there were loads of families in big rooms with bunk beds. But my mum and I and my sister got a little attic room all to ourselves.

And I remember, sort of, I think I became my mum's helper if you like, because my Mum had a very privileged upbringing before the Second World War and they always had maids and so on, so she didn't, she wasn't used to the hard life. Any time I remember the journey to that camp, I remember we had to go through with buses and we had to walk, and my mum was carrying Sophie my sister and I was carrying the suitcases.

And then in this little attic room, I would help taking up, I don't know whether it was coal or wood, for the stove and so on. But apart from those sort of things, I, I had a nice time, because I met lots of young kids, and I liked playing with them. And I remember things like, the Swedish Red Cross tried to organise lots of activities. There could have been lots of, maybe, English volunteers, because I remember being taught an English song called "London burning, London burning". I could not speak any English then.

And then the other thing I remember is, as we didn't have many clothes, only the ones we came out with, lots of people from all over the world, had donated clothes. And so, I remember going into a room where my mother chose clothes for me and I'll never forget a grey cardigan with red decorations on it which I couldn't stand but my… I had to wear it… And… And then what happened next was, oh there was a nearby village and we sometimes went into the village and if we were very lucky we bought a chocolate bar you know I used to … I remember that… And then… my sister caught measles and my mum couldn't cope with that so she telephoned my father and my father came and collected us and took us back to Vienna and there, I don't know how, we rented a room in somebody's flat. And… yes she was called Frau Doctor Ulmann and we lived in this bed-seat for another few months until it was decided where we were going to come next. My parents knew they did not want to stay in Vienna, but they wanted to go to the States, where … we had relatives, but they didn't manage to get on the quota. They would need to get quotas of refugees. And then the second choice was Canada. And it did not get on the quota there. So England was our third choice and my parents had, could speak English and they had friends in England who helped them to find jobs here before we arrived and so we actually came to England with them having work permits to work here.

But I do remember still at the refugee camp, you… on certain days you'd see whole lot of coaches arriving. One coach would say Canada. Another coach would say Australia. Another coach would say, I don't know, [pause] Belgium and people would get on these coaches and would go off to these countries from there. Obviously as a kid I never thought twice about, this was all normal. Because what happens to you as a child is all normal. It's only looking back objectively now that it seems "Gosh, that was strange'.

Just to bring you back to what you mentioned about not talking to your parents about what happened or they not talking to you about it. I am really struck by your very lucid recall of all of these events. Have you ever approached them about it and talked to them about it?

No, I haven't, because … and of course they're dead now, but I was always very scared of my father. He was not an easy person to talk to. My mother was an easy person to talk to, but she was very timid, and I suppose I modelled myself on her for many years and I never really talked to her because there were other, she was very sensitive. She… I don't know if I said in the other interview, I had a brother who died in Hungary, who was eighteen months younger than me and she never really recovered from that. And, so one was very protective towards my mother, because, you know, you knew she could get upset quite quickly. But yes I was I don't know why I never rebelled, I never, it never occurred to me to object to anything that happened to me. Never ever.

And I don't know if I said in my previous interview that as an adult I had a lot of therapy, psychotherapy over, I don't know, fifteen / twenty years and I know that my psychotherapy often says: "Why did you not say "No"? Why did you not say, "I am not doing that"?' But it never even occurred to me that I could do that. Whatever was thrown at me, I just went with it.

Thank you for sharing that with me. Just to bring you back again to this time when you came to England, do you remember the journey?

Indeed, very clearly. We came on that train. And I remember… we did have couchettes and there were beds and what I remember is that I think my father slept with my sister and as she was only eighteen months old she went into bed but he has never let anyone forget. And then I remember crossing over to England by boat. I mean I had no idea since he'd just laughed when I asked why we were coming. So I didn't know why we were coming here. And on this boat, crossing the channel, all I remember is the grey sky and … there was a very nice English man that… was terribly nice to us on the boat and obviously realised we were refugees and he bought us a sandwich and I've never forgotten, they gave us this sandwich and all it had in it was … a lettuce leave… and I thought "what peculiar country am I coming to where a sandwich is two pieces of bread and a lettuce leave."

And then we arrived to Dover and I remember that we were taken obviously over to some immigration office where we spent a long time because… my … I suppose we all had to have medicals and then we got on the train and I remember in darkness, we arrive to Victoria. And I remember coming on the train and thinking "God, I don't like this place'. I hated it.

I hated England for many years. I somewhat took an instant dislike to it, because I suppose I felt, must have felt I was forced to come here. I didn't

want to come here. I liked my life in Hungary as a child, and I, and I did not understand why I had to leave it behind. When we arrived at Victoria station, there was quite a deputation waiting for us, because my parents had lots of friends here who had come here after the Second World War so they didn't hang around in Hungary until '56.

And they had already found us a bed-seat in Muswell Hill in North London and they all kissed us and hugged us, but I didn't have a clue who they were. Probably gave us all presents and stuck us in a taxi. And I remember going through… I think we passed probably what is Selfridges and travelled for an hour to Muswell Hill from Victoria and then we arrived to this house, which was owned by a Hungarian ladies who had let lots of her rooms in her house to other Hungarian refugees. It was what would be a sort of five bedroom-detached house somewhere but with loads of families living there. And we had a bed-seat and I think I spent the first night in the first room as our parents and my sister. And then, on the second night she said "Why don't you put Trixi in my bedroom, you know, you'll have more room in that room." And I did pass that next night in her bedroom. And the whole thing was so alien to me that obviously my parents could see that that was a bit too much. And so I moved back into their room.

And I remember in this house doing the family washing in the bathroom because I actually knew more about washing and cooking and ironing than my mum did because I had spent a lot of time with the maid and I knew how to do these things whereas my mum didn't.

And then I think after a few months, we … my father became an article clerk in an office, in a solicitor's office and my mum went into a chemical practice because she was a chemist and my sister got put into a nursery, which she hated, and I got taken into a convent probably the day after, which the friends here had found for me. But again I had never seen a convent, I'd never seen any nuns, and it was totally bewildering to be taken there and I was just dumped there. It was in Bayswater so rather far away from Muswell Hill. And I've got very strong memories of my first few months there as well.

You did mention something about it in the pre-plinth interview, and in fact something that I really wanted to ask you about your identity as a Jewish and how it was like back home, whether your parents practiced Jewish rituals at home in Hungary and whether you were brought up as a Jewish person yourself?

No. And I was brought up as nothing because they were not practicing Jews. They belonged to sort of an upper middle class elite where I think probably a lot of their friends were Jewish but they were not practicing at all. And I think during the communist times they thought it was best for me not to know that I had a religion even. But it wasn't important to them, it was never important to them. Except that of course, they suffered because of it, because they were in hiding in Budapest during the Second World War, and because they were Jewish. But they never talked about, never ever talked about it as such when I was a child. And the only reason I knew that I was Jewish, I may have known, but I don't think I really took it in, was that when the maid said to me, 'do you know you are Jewish and you killed Jesus?" So I remember that. And… Otherwise I have no… recollection of being anything except I… I think I knew I was christened a catholic, because many Jews then after the Second World War thought that, at least it was on my mum's side, her own mother, thought: "Why prolong this handicap of being Jewish? You know. What if there is another persecution? Say it would be better for us all to become Christians." So on my mum's side everybody got christened. But it didn't mean anything, we didn't practice anything, we didn't believe in it. So I think, but because of that, because I was christened as a catholic, when we got to England, the friends here, had approached something called the Catholic Women League and they paid for me to go to this convent, which was a private school. And that seemed important to everybody, because I had missed the Eleven Plus so I would have gone to secondary modern school here and they obviously all thought that was not a good idea, so they thought the best option was to send me to this convent. And that's how I ended up there. And there, there was a Hungarian nun who took me under her wings and I did my first communion and confession and confirmation and I became a very strong catholic for many years.

We touched upon the issue of identity earlier before we began recording and I just wonder if you would like to talk about that: what it was like for you arriving here, in a place that was totally different and alien to you, and then becoming more accustomed to the way of life, are you able to trace that for me?

So, I think, when I arrived I must have felt very strongly Hungarian and in fact, that's stayed with me ever since because it's very strange for, I think, an 11 year-old, so, so when I left and I am now sixty-four and I still have this very strong Hungarian identity. I think that must be quite unusual. But I don't … now feel Hungarian. Well, I do and I don't. Because I think I became very confused on many levels. I hated being here, so I didn't want to acquire an English identity. I didn't want to loose my accent and obviously, I regret that

now. I wish I could speak English without an accent. It would be very convenient to be able to switch it on and off, because even now, people say: “Oh! Where are you from?” and I say: “Oh! I am from Hungary”. And they expect me to say then: Then they ask me: “How long have you been here?” They expect me to say: “Oh five years!” So I’ve been here over fifty years, but my accent is still so strong. So I think that is because I didn’t want to get rid of it at the time, and now I can’t.

I never felt English and I still have problems with it now, about identity on that level, because… Obviously when we came out we really thought and I grew up thinking that I could never ever, ever go back to Hungary because there was the iron curtain so I felt this tremendous sense of loss. And I use to dream that one day I’d wake up in my bed back in my flat in Hungary. And then when unexpectedly the iron curtain came down, the Perestroika in ‘89, we then went back, we couldn’t go back because we were political refugees and my father thought it would be too dangerous to go back. But when we did go back then it was completely traumatic because I never thought I’d ever, ever see Hungary again. So it was completely unreal.

And we’ve now been back lots of time, and it’s only now that I am beginning to come to terms with the fact that I am neither English nor Hungarian. So when I speak Hungarian I’ve got a very strong English accent and my Hungarian I sat the level of an eleven-year-old child and not an adult. And there is not one language I can speak perfectly. And so I feel sort of stateless and I think I’ve always felt stateless. But it is only now that I am getting really old that I can acknowledge that my parents were right to bring me here and I am lucky to be leaving here rather than in Hungary because objectively I can see that I am much better off here in every sense of the way: stability and so on.

But emotionally, you know, I’ve, you know, I’ve always resented having to be here. They loved being here, absolutely loved being here and in spite of the fact that I’ve got my children and my grand-children here, I am only just now coming to terms with the fact that I am British, I’ve been British for fifty years and that’s not a bad thing to be.

And of course I’ve also got identity problems regarding religion because having been nothing, then having been a very devout catholic and then by chance I met Eric, my husband at university, we were students together and he comes from an orthodox Jewish background and his parents accepted me because they knew that I was Jewish by origin. And now, more and more, I am part of his identity, so I don’t … I do feel Jewish but not at all as a believer,

only as … through ethnic origin wise. And now I feel, in the liberal synagogue that we go to sometimes, I feel reasonably at home there because there are lots of other people in my situation there, who have come from Europe, some parts of Europe and have made England their country. But I don't believe in Judaism as a religion, so I suppose I see myself as an agonistic, so I've always seen my self identity-wise totally confused, just confused. But I think because of all these different experiences, I think on the plus side, is that I am very able to be, I am very able to empathise with other people from similar background who also have problems of identity, who have come from different cultures and have got to get use to a new culture.

Just a question around the "One & Other" programme, one of Gormley's main ideas was to get a measurement of the UK today, who occupies the UK today, so where would you say you fit into all of that?

Well, Britain … since I've arrived, has become a really multi-cultural society. Which is fantastic! So whereas I really felt like an outsider when I arrived and I sometimes did have the feeling looked down on me because I had an accent, I feel like I fit in perfectly now. Absolutely perfectly. Because especially living around here, we are all part of a very multicultural society. I must say when I lived in Keele in Staffordshire, I did feel like someone from the moon, but down here in Watford and in London, I feel like I fit in perfectly. And there is no prejudice against me, because society has changed so much. So it feels very comfortable now.

Presumably you have returned to Budapest.

Yes. Many times. Yes.

Can you recount the first time?

It was really traumatic and it was very funny because we went with other friends, we went in two cars, and we got to the border and we crossed the border in our car and we stopped to have a picnic somewhere near the border and there was a playground and at that time, my two daughters must have been, I can't remember exactly, but maybe, ten and fourteen, Tanir, oh… she may have been smaller, went on this seesaw, which was really decrepit and she twisted her ankle and so, we then spent the rest in Budapest in and out of hospitals with her, and she and I are emotionally very close, there is a very strong bond between us, and I almost think, and I think she agrees, it may have been almost sub-consciously on purpose so that I would not have this terrible experience, you know, I'd have something else to preoccupy me whilst

I was in Budapest rather than this just this traumatic experience of being back there.

It didn't seem real I remember, because I'd spent so many years visiting other countries in Europe saying: "Gosh this reminds me of Hungary! The pavements, the pebble… The cobblestones or the food or the food is like … food I had in Hungary or this building looks like a building in Budapest and I was now actually back in Budapest, I said "This looks very much like Budapest!" And it was very hard to actually think: "This really is Budapest" rather than just something that is actually like Budapest. Because I had spent all these years thinking that I would never ever, ever, see it again and it has taken lots of visits back to be able to feel fairly normal, but it still gives me a … a huge kick when I arrive back there. And I think if we had lots and lots of money, we would buy a flat in Budapest. But I mean we can't afford it so we don't, but it does give me a huge kick to go back there and I have this terribly romantic feeling. You know.

I see Hungary as it was when I was back there age ten because I am lucky in having a best friend who was my mo… my neighbour, a girl, and we are in very close contact now and obviously her experiences of Hungary are the real experiences of what is like being in Hungary and she knows I have got this fantasised world of what Hungary is like rather than the reality.

What happened to your home in Hungary?

Well, it was quite interesting, because it was then… We gave it to some very distant relations of relations cause housing was a big issue and so they all were delighted to get this lovely flat in the middle of Budapest. And then I can't remember if I said anything about this in the previous interview, but once I had an aunt who went back to Budapest and we still couldn't. And she went to visit these relatives and she, apparently, went round the flat taking paintings off the whole and saying: "Well, I think I'll take the art to… you know, Trixi's family in London because it's theirs." And of course they called the police.

She was… It was ours, but we had left it behind. Anyway. So she wasn't allowed to bring anything out of this flat. So the consequence of that is that they wouldn't let anyone in into this flat. And I've always wanted to go back and see it. And I remember each time we went back, we'd go and stand opposite the house and I'd look up to the bedroom that I thought I'd wake up one morning, and I was dying to see it and we couldn't see it.

And then the very last time being back, or almost like, and that was… I think it was last year or the year before. We went with some friends for a few days and we walked past the house and there was a "for sale" sign by our flat. And I said 'Oh my god I get to go and see it". And so, we rang the estate agent, we were very naughty: we pretended we wanted to buy it. And so we went to see it. And it's been wonderful for me to be able to see it, because it was totally different, I couldn't tell, I could recognise bits of it but obviously the people who had lived in it since had furnished it differently and there was a lady who, whose mother had lived in that flat the, to speak with us and she said "you know I don't want to sell this flat because I'd grown up in this flat, you know, and my mum had done it up, how it is". And then it clicked with me that this lady had so much more right to that flat, because I'd lived there ten years, but she must have lived in it thirty / forty years. And so I've come to terms with that now. I am so pleased that that coincidence happened, that I am not still yearning you know for this … room and the flat how I remember it, but I know the reality behind it, so I am not yearning for it anymore. That was very lucky for me.

Which year did you first go back to Budapest?

'89. So we came out in '57, went back in '89, so is that thirty-two years. Yes, a thirty-two year gap. It was pretty traumatic, the sense of loss.

And where would you say you call home, now?

Here. Definitely here. Because this is where my family is. And England has been very good to me. So although I said how, how much I hated it, I've got so much to be tremendously grateful for, but it's only in my old age that I can… recognise that. And it's only now that I can see how much I love London for example. Every time I come in from Watford, it gives me a kick to be, it gives a me a kick to be here. Yes, so… Luckily, you know, trying to come to terms with that this is home. It's taken a long time.

Tell me a little bit about your daughters? What are they doing at the moment?

Well, the older one is exactly the same age as you. She is, I think so, she was born in 1974. Yes?

That's right, yes, that's my age. Yes.

She is an actuary, she works for PricewaterhouseCoopers, and she is a director there so she's done very nicely. She has got a little boy, fourteen-

month-old; he is called George after my father. I was very touched that they decided to call him after my father and my younger daughter Felicity is thirty-one and she is a fast track civil servant, but at the moment she is on maternity leave, because she has got a four-month-old little girl called Rebecca and she is married to a New Zealander called Vaughn and they live in Kew. The other daughter in Bishop Stopford so Watford is sort of one hour in opposite directions to see them. And, yes! I suppose Eric and I see our daughters as our "biggest achievement" in life, we are very proud of them.

How does your family view your experience of going on the plinth?

I think they were very excited for me, they really were. And they came at four in the morning to see me. So, yes it was a big event. And after we stood on the plinth we … well, actually if you really want the truth because I like my own comfort and it was four in the morning, we … took out some rooms in, is it called the Trafalgar hotel, it's the one with which the Fourth Plinth had special arrangements. I think we had two bedrooms there. So, because it would have been so awful to come in from all these different places at four in the morning. So we actually met I think at night and then we all got out at four in the morning. And then after I'd stood on the plinth we all went back to the hotel and they were very sweet because they provided coffee and croissants and then later on breakfast. So it was a very nice experience so we were not roughing it.

Oh that's wonderful, thank you very much for the interview today. Thank you.

That's a pleasure, I've enjoyed it.

Thank you. Is there anything you'd like to add before we end?

No, no, no, no. Have you got what you wanted though?

Yes, certainly, thank you.

Good.