

## One & Other Project

[The interview was conducted at the interviewee's place, she had her baby on her lap for most of the interview].

*My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here today on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2010 at 3 p.m. to interview Rebecca, so Rebecca tell me where we are now?*

In my house in Camberwell where I'm having my interview from the Sky profile from my time on the plinth.

*OK so Rebecca I really wanted to bring you back to your experience on the plinth and I also know that since then you've had a child.*

Absolutely, I was pregnant with my child when I went on to the plinth and the build-up to the plinth and my time on there was all based around the fact that I was pregnant.

*And when did you actually have the baby?*

I had the baby 7 days, exactly 7 days, after I appeared on the plinth. I appeared on Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup> on the plinth and on the Friday I was interviewed by Clive Anderson about my time on the plinth. And then 4 hours after my interview, the contractions I'd been having that week kicked up a gear and I went into established labour and about 24 hours after that my little boy arrived.

*And how have you been since?*

Yes, obviously fine. It's a completely life changing thing, obviously, but yes, I'm kind of getting used to it 6 months in and everything is starting to become kind of normal [chuckles]. But yes, now very, very good very nice.

*So in your previous interview you talked quite a bit about what life had been like through being pregnant. I wonder what life had been like since you've had your child?*

A lot harder that's for sure [giggles]. But a lot more enjoyable, obviously. I mean when you are pregnant it's the build-up to change and it's the build-up to this kind of new part of your life and you don't really get that in other parts of your life, you know. You don't get 9 months warning that everything is about to change and it's scary, you know. There's a lot going on in that time but it's very exciting but I don't think anything can really prepare you for what's to come and it's absolutely amazing, very scary and, but yes, absolutely wonderful.

*We should say your baby is sitting here with us.*

As you can probably hear his little greedy chomping away. But yes, he sat [t]here [for] part of the interview like he was in all of the plinth bits. It seems all there at the time [?] but he was inside [chuckles].

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*So I remember you saying in your previous interview about you're worried about your health, that you had realised that you had a type of diabetes [baby voice in the background]?*

Oh yes, gestational diabetes. It's fairly common within pregnancy [baby voice in the background], but what it generally means is that the baby is getting too much sugar from the food that he's eating and tends to be born quite big [baby voice in the background]. Shush it! [baby voice in the background]. Yes they tend to be born quite big and I actually started carrying excess fluids, which made my bump very big and meant that my baby was kind of floating around in a lot more fluid than it should have been, which can end up being dangerous because they can be turned the wrong way during labour and stuff. But actually my baby was very small he was born 6.10 and [baby voice in the background] he went down to 5.10 [baby voice in the background]. What are you going to do, what are you doing? [baby voice in the background].

*OK, so we just took a small break, and we've moved the mic because you moved your baby around.*

Yes that's right he's now on the other side hopefully settling.

*OK so I really wanted to know about how you felt once the baby was born because you were worried about this health condition that you had?*

Yes I was mildly worried. I think, I was worried as any kind of new mother, then, although labour is increasingly scary the closer you get to it, and I don't think any other mum can really explain what to expect, I think anybody is scared in that kind of position regardless of how your health is and everything about my labour was fantastic. It basically took him 40 minutes to arrive; 3 pushes and he was out, which was better than I could have ever expected. But it was very scary. I mean even afterwards, most of the mums are saying 'never do that again', but I'm already planning my next one [chuckles]. But yes, once he was here he was perfect. I mean we had some problems establishing feeding for the first few days. I think, I was given a bit of bad advice and we didn't get him feeding for about 3 or 4 days and his weight dropped, which is quite normal, but it went down quite a lot and it didn't start coming back up. But in the end we got him feeding and, yes, as you can tell he's very well now. But yes, we had a few small problems, but obviously nothing that isn't quite common within pregnancy.

*And what caused the fact that he wasn't feeding?*

It was partially to do with the gestational diabetes and because of the [baby voice in the background] amount of sugars in the womb. His blood sugar levels were quite high when he was born and, because of that he wasn't what I was told; he wouldn't be hungry and not to really push trying to latch him to the breast and so I didn't. I didn't really know any better so I was just following the advice I was given and in actual fact that kind of turned out to be quite detrimental because my milk hadn't started coming through either [baby voice in the background]. Excuse you and because of those two factors, by the time he was interested in latching my milk wasn't coming through quick enough for him so that delayed him by another day and

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then once we realised the milk wasn't coming through, because the doctors were checking his blood sugar every day, and it was dropping and it was latching, but he wasn't obviously getting anything because the blood sugar was dropping and so I ended up trying lots of things to try and get my milk flowing which didn't really work. And a lot of breastfeeding counsellors tried to give me advice but some of the advice wasn't exactly the best advice [chuckles] and wasn't very helpful, some were very helpful but generally we weren't getting anything moving and in the end a friend of mine suggested to try electric breast pump and I spent about half an hour on there and it came through. Thank god, and that was just on the borders of giving him a formula top up which I really didn't want to do. I'm quite anti-formula and you know there's a lot of bad things about formula and I didn't want to give it to my child, if I didn't have to and so, yes thankfully we've got my milk moving and we've got them feeding and they let me come home and I was in there for 4 days which was very depressing. Maternity wards are the worst wards in all hospitals and hospitals themselves aren't very nice and it was just baking hot in there, absolutely boiling even in October. I had the sun shining on me and then the radiators absolutely blasting in there obviously because of all these tiny babies and it just made things a lot harder and a lot more uncomfortable. I think it was a great experience to push me into having a home birth possibly next time. But yes after we got him feeding his weight kept dropping because it's very natural when a baby's born, they usually lose up to about 10% of their birth weight and he lost 10% and he went down to 5.10 and he was very small and he looked very dehydrated and we were having lots of skin to skin time trying to promote lots of breast feeding. And yes, eventually it was fine it was absolutely fine [feedback from the microphone]. Sorry I keep touching the mic. I did have to top up his feed, but I actually did that with donated breast milk instead of formula because I wanted to avoid formula altogether, if possible. And yes, so to be honest I only did that because the midwife that was visiting me pushed that he needed a top up. I mean, really, if I'd thought about it, I'd've got a few opinions. He wouldn't have necessarily needed a top up. I think if I just kept going with the feeding. But it just kind of placated the midwife and got her off my back and she signed me off 'OK' and she didn't have to come around anymore so it did its job in that sense. But yes, eventually we got there and as you can probably tell he's a very good, greedy little feeder now and doing well aren't you?

*OK thanks. You talked in your previous interview about spending quite a lot of time online with all these mothers' groups.*

Yes, absolutely. I'm part of quite a few groups I was originally part of the quite famous ones like Mumsnet and baby centre and baby expert but the things they said didn't really sit well with me. They were, I suppose they were quite standardised whereas some of my ideas of parenting aren't the normal, I suppose, or the standard and so I found it quite difficult gaining information and relating to a lot of the women on there. I would recommend a website called 'cosa nostra' [?], which is, which is also a mums' based forum. But the women on there, sort of very heavily promote individual choices, not just kind of following the norm, not just bottle feeding because it's more convenient and things like that and I found that a lot more comfortable and I've got a lot of support from there. I was due to have what is it called an induction quite close to the, quite close to when I gave birth and the mums there were very helpful in helping me know what decisions I would need to make and how much the

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gestational diabetes would affect the [microphone feedback] labour and delivery and, kind of, all my options around drugs and things like that and they were ,very kind ,of a lot of the mums there are very kind, of pro-natural choice which I would very much like and I got a lot of help from there when I really struggled [microphone feedback]. To start, a lot of my support came via that forum with women suggesting kind of ways of getting going and how long I could realistically leave it before needing to top him up because I had the midwife coming in everyday saying 'you've got to give him the formula' and really pushing me [microphone feedback] so it was really helpful to know from these online resources what my rights are and give me that extra information and, I think, you know they probably between all of them got me through my pregnancy and, kind of, kept me sane.

*[Microphone feedback] OK so out of all these groups and possibly charities and so on that you came across about childbirth issues, why did you choose Tommy?*

I think Tommy was because, while I was spending time on all of these forums, I think it constantly came up that there was this darker side; 'how wonderful it all is' and everyone speaks about them, the fantastic side of it, there is this fear amongst all women, of you know, the things that go wrong and very commonly go wrong. You know, there's miscarriage and still birth and other things like gestational diabetes and all kind of things that can possibly. you know, ruin, what should ruin the most magical time and, you know, it can be absolutely disastrous and heart breaking and, it just seems to me, that while I was on the plinth celebrating what was my kind of magical birth, I should kind of make notes of the fact that I am very lucky because there are other women that aren't lucky and, you know, like the 17 women every day in the UK that go into childbirth and unfortunately end up with not a baby at the end of it because their poor little one has died. And I think that is one of the scariest things, until your baby is in your arms. The fear doesn't stop, but it's a lot better when you can actually see your child and take care of them yourself and I think that was the last point, you know, for me I got kind of through the miscarriage fear, I got to a point where if he was born he had a very good chance of surviving and I got to the point where he wouldn't have been premature if he'd been born so I didn't have that worry anymore and it just kind of seemed that the stage I was at that would be my natural worry and so that should really be what I should raise money for at that point. It just seemed like a logical thing to do for me.

*Did you have any other ideas?*

I had hundreds of ideas. I mean I spoke to everyone. I told everyone what I was going to be doing and I was looking for you know a baby-based charity and I told my midwife and she told all the midwives that she worked with and I got email after email about all these different problems that [have] got charities attached to them and all these different things that I could draw awareness to and it just seemed that one would be the one; the closest to my heart at that time.

*I noticed you were raising money for Tommy and that you basically met the target that you had set yourself.*

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The original target, yes. I upped the target after we reached it to give people the incentive, once you reach the target, not to stop [chuckles].

*How much did you make?*

I can't remember off the top of my head but I think it was £500 which was brilliant but I secretly hoped for more so I may well do another something soon to raise a bit more for them [microphone feedback noise].

*OK if I bring you back to the actual time when you went on the plinth. I watched your video online and I noticed you were talking to somebody that [had] came off the plinth. I wonder if you realised the microphones were on and people were hearing you.*

Do you know I didn't really. I know there were microphones but when I'd been watching the plinth over the weeks before, I was watching it on my laptop and I always have the sound muted on my laptop and so although I'd been watching all these people I never really, I knew there were microphones, I knew that I had a microphone on, but it just didn't click in my mind that people would be listening to me as well as hear me [chuckles]. So I kind of knew, but it wasn't until about 15 minutes after being on the plinth and I think I was saying things, thinking 'Oh that might not be the best thing in the world to say', that I suddenly realised that people were listening to me as well [chuckles] so 'no', at that point I probably didn't. But I don't think that I would have changed if I had realised a few things really [chuckles and microphone feedback created again as baby plays with cord].

*I heard you say to the person coming off the plinth that you did have some other idea but you could not afford it. I wonder what that was, do you remember?*

I don't remember that at all. What else did I say, did I just say I've got another idea but I couldn't really afford to do it?

*I think you were just getting to know each other and asked where he was from and that kind of thing and I heard that so I thought perhaps we can learn more about the ideas that you had about going on the plinth but if you don't remember that's OK.*

No sorry I don't.

*So just to bring you back to the time when you went on the plinth what was it like for you?*

Umm, I was very scared before I went up there. I wasn't until that morning or I suppose the day before, when I was collecting everything together and I was just getting ready to kind of go because we left really early [baby voice in the background]. We left here at 5 in the morning to get down to Trafalgar Square. We had to log in early and kind of have the interview and all that kind of thing and then I think the fear really bungled [?] up in me. When we arrived I was just, I think very naturally, I was just quite embarrassed in this kind, centre of attention position, I kind of changed my mind, not enough to back out but in a way that I don't want to do this anymore. But as soon as I got up there, it was absolutely fine. I was absolutely fine

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the second I got up there. All of my fears disappeared especially because there was hardly anybody in the square which was really helpful [chuckles] and pretty much everyone there I knew as well because a lot of my friends and family turned up and about half way through being on the plinth a lot of traffic started to arrive as it started to get to the time of morning deliveries and things like that and vans and lorries would beep in and things like that and I found that really exciting and I was kind of given a bit of a wave and it was really nice.

*Did you have any interaction with the audience or your friends even in the Square?*

Yes I think I was chatting away to all of them the whole time. My best friend wasn't there so she phoned me and she was on the phone for the whole time I was on the plinth so I was talking to her on speaker phone and you know I was talking to my nieces and nephews and my friends and stuff, they all came out to see me. Mad people getting up so early to come and see me when they could have done it online but you know I really appreciated it. It was great.

*And what was it like immediately afterwards when you came down?*

I had a bit of an adrenaline rush, I think, because it was really cold but I couldn't feel the cold and everyone kept going you must be freezing and you are shivering but I wasn't cold. I think I was just, had this kind of adrenaline rush going, I was so excited by this thing that I think I was very aware how quickly it was over before I was on there. An hour is going to be so long, you know [baby voice in the background]. I'm not going to be able to fill the time and I'm going to look like I've got nothing to do and once I got up I didn't really have enough time to do everything that I wanted to do. I felt like it had kind of flown by. I could have done longer [chuckles].

*Tell me what you actually did on the plinth?*

While I was on the plinth, I firstly, what are you doing [talking to the baby], I firstly got up there to, the main thing I wanted to do was to make what I call watchers which was a kind of a tribute to Antony Gormley and the little men that he made in some of his pieces and they for me were representing the 17 babies that had died that day so that was the most important thing for me to get that on there and, I sneakily, I didn't tell anyone beforehand but I secretly stuck those to the edge of the plinth and I really hoped that they would stay but obviously they took them off. I was kind of hopeful that it would happen but I think they forgot two of them which is really good. I think they stayed up there for the rest of the day before they dried and [baby voice in the background] maybe fell off and what not so I did make my mark. So that was good and then the other thing I did, I took up there lots of balloons with the Tommy's emblem [baby voice in the background] and attached to them was a little envelope with a little kind of gift in and a request to make a [baby voice in the background] donation to Tommy's [baby voice in the background]. All right babes, see what we've got sorry I'm just going to grab him a toy.

*Shall I pause it?*

If you want to. It will only take me a second [baby voice in the background].

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*OK we just took a small break again to get some toys for the boy. So you were talking about your time on the plinth and you obviously mentioned this in the [baby voice in the background] previous interview about the balloons and the little watchers and so on but you mentioned there were things you didn't get time to do.*

The only thing I didn't get time to do was to set off as many balloons as I wanted to. You know I went up there with some and, unfortunately, the ones I've been up there with because of the kind of string I used they are all kind of tied together and I didn't really think I had time to untangle them all so they could go individually so they all went up into one big lump which was quite [chuckles] disappointing and I'm hoping that somewhere while they were up there they untangled and made their own way but you know I only got to do a few balloons while I was up there and I quite liked to have ploughed through lots more. And yes I think that's the only thing because of how quickly the time went which I didn't expect which I didn't let as many off as I wanted and obviously with each one of them there was the hope of another donation for Tommy's.

*So looking back at the website that you were raising money through for Tommy, how much of an impact do you think the balloons in terms of raising awareness had [baby voice in the background]?*

The balloons themselves pretty much none, unfortunately [chuckles]. I think it was partially because they went up in this lump and I didn't get as many offers as I wanted to, although when we came home we did do the rest and we let them out from here in the hope that people would find them, but I didn't get kind of any anonymous donations or anything like that. I doubt people found them or no one found them [chuckles], unfortunately. But yes, I mean, I don't know if there was anything I could have done to encourage that more or something more, I could have put in the balloons something like that but it was a good idea in my mind.

*So what happened when you came down immediately afterwards. You mentioned the adrenaline rush but how about comments from people?*

Well as I came down, I went over to do another interview for Sky and a lady came up to me. She was saying 'Oh I just watched you up there, you know that was wonderful' and she went 'is that stomach real?'. And I was like, 'yes of course, it's real, it's my tummy'. I think because I was in a naked suit rather than actually being naked and because my bump was painted [baby voice in the background] with a portrait of kind of how my son would have looked inside [baby voice in the background], I think it kind of didn't look real so people expected to be just this kind of performance piece with kind of this added prosthetic lump on the front. Yes [baby voice in the background], I was a bit disappointed about that [baby voice in the background]. I mean once upon a time in my college days a lot of my work I kind of did, excuse me do you want me to? Shush little boy.

*We are resuming the recording again and the baby is now feeding so it will be quieter. So Rebecca, to bring you back you came down the plinth and you were taken for a Sky interview there and then?*

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That's right and as I said, the lady came up to me and asked me if my bump was real and I kind of thought to myself, I'm back in my university days where I studied photography and in a lot of my photography I did use lots of nudity stuff in it so I was thinking if it was in the middle of summer perhaps I should have gone up there [baby voice in the background] kind of nude as it were [baby voice in the background] so that people kind of knew [baby crying in the background]. Sorry.

*So we took another break and we are back on again. So you were mentioning that you had a Sky Arts interview immediately after, which I assume you weren't expecting?*

No I was expecting it. I knew that they wanted to do that because they were worried that I would go into labour before the Clive Anderson interview on the Friday for Sky Arts and so they wanted to have something to show on the show because that was live. So obviously if I had gone into labour before that point they'd have this big empty slot on the show so they wanted to make sure of that which was probably quite good considering how quickly afterwards I went into labour.

*And what happened during the interview, what did they ask you?*

In the interview I think Clive Anderson was [a] lovely guy. I really enjoyed meeting him but he, it was basically around the fact that you know you could go into labour any minute are you feeling contractions and at that point I had had mild contractions start earlier in the week. I'd gone into hospital and a bit early because I think I noticed he wasn't moving like most mums I was a bit worried about that so I went in for a check-up and he was absolutely fine. I think I've just been too busy to notice him moving or something and at that point they said that in fact that having a quiet moment can sometimes be an indication that contractions are starting and I'd said 'oh, I've had you know some hicks and that' and they looked at the monitor and said actually they are probably contractions and so they [had] started by that point and they were still going on all the way through and it was quite funny when I was waiting to actually go to the studio with the crew. Behind the scenes I'd stand there and rubbed my tummy thinking 'oh is that a contraction' or 'he's maybe coming, should we panic?'. It was quite sweet but I was huge by that point and very uncomfortable and, but you know, they made me feel very comfortable and looked after which was quite nice.

*Rebecca I saw this picture on the Tommy's profile website and wondered whether it was your belly?*

Yes, it was my belly.

*Which was used as well as a picture for your profile.*

Yes I quite liked the idea of it because I was obviously centring everything around him. I wanted it to be something kind of about my bump rather than just my [?] face on there [chuckles].

*And it seems to me an unusually large belly.*



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Oh I think it's fairly normal for a pregnancy belly but I suppose that was right towards the end of my pregnancy so it's fairly big [chuckles].

*OK would it have anything to do with the fact you had that extra water or was that then absorbed?*

I did actually manage to get my waters down somewhat but the biggest my waters went was the equivalent of 40 weeks which is full term pregnancy anyway so it would be probably as big as would be a full term pregnancy belly so I wasn't abnormally large [chuckles]. I wasn't twins large or anything like that.

*Perhaps because it's a close up.*

You can't see it in context to me, can you? It's just this big belly [chuckles].

*I also noticed that you had a message that you wrote on the Tommy's website after you'd been on the plinth and talked about what it was like. So I thought we should discuss it and, you basically, you were very excited about the fact you were meeting Alison Lapper.*

Yes, Alison Lapper that was a real last minute thing. Sky Arts phoned me up just to say about the interview and just kind of dropped it in as if I already knew that Alison would be there and I was very excited because, I mean, Alison Lapper's statue that was there originally by Mark Quinn, was just such an amazing piece of sculpture and it was something I'd always admired and I really wanted to kind of show tribute towards that, [in] my piece and, hence why, I did the naked suit or kind of nudity around my pregnancy and it seemed kind of natural to show tribute towards that with me being so pregnant. I was [in a] very similar state of pregnancy to [the one] Alison was in her sculpture as well and I also, I think, by kind of acknowledging it, I wanted to kind of try and normalise it because I found that a lot of the people I spoke to who was there if they didn't like it, their reason for not liking it was because of the disability and they felt that shouldn't be publicised and things like that and I just felt that it was kind of unacceptable that people should even think in that way and so I kind of wanted to draw a bit of normality towards it and I suppose by me being in that way people had to question exactly what it was they didn't like about her statue and that would come down to the disability which would have been the only kind of difference between mine and her appearance and so you know but hopefully making people realise that was their problem, they would question their own kind of thoughts around that issue [baby voice in the background]. Do you want to pause it just for a second?

*OK we took another break just to move the baby around. So you mentioned meeting Alison Lapper, did you get to talk to her?*

I did actually. Our interviews were separate because where I was interviewed in the studio, [it] was very high up. It was three flights up the stairs in a little room and obviously Alison is in a wheelchair, she couldn't get up there so she was interviewed in the Square and then they had a minibus outside which was like the equivalent of a

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green room and she came in there afterwards and I got to meet her and she was complimentary about my time on the plinth but also she was giving me lots of pregnancy advice and talking to me kind of about what to expect and telling me about her pregnancy. She's got a little boy called Paris which was in the interview with her and, yes it was really nice to talk to her about that it was great.

*And you also mentioned in your previous interview about noticing that there aren't many statues of women that have had an influence in history and you also mentioned that you are a feminist so I just wondered whether you want to talk to me [about] when you first became interested in this sort of political arena.*

I suppose it was when I went to university and, I was kind of, well I suppose maybe college and university, and I was kind of put in that point where I needed to consider making pieces of art about something and I had to question what mattered to me and where my heart layed and to, kind of, figure out around there. I mean, I've had very strong female figures in my life, strong male figures as well but I think I've always admired the women in my life and we've got this kind of strong independent women throughout our family and I've always considered myself that and you know looking at the world in relation to what I [have] kind of grown to learn a woman should be like doesn't actually match the worldview towards women and my views are kind of different and I feel that way, of kind of projecting how I view the world should be [incomp] with feminist issues. Also I think it depends on the definition of feminism and I think my definition of feminism is about equality and about acceptance of equality between both sexes, whereas a lot of feminist issues are about the superiority of the female which I feel deeply. We are very superior to men [chuckles]. I don't promote but yes, when I was at university I started doing self-portraiture and around that my feminist issues came out quite naturally and by looking at my work and realising that they were promoting this kind of feminist attitude and I was emulating a lot of female artists that I then considered my own ideal a lot more deeply and, therefore, they obviously, they came out more in my work and it was in an ever increasing circle until I finally stood up one day; 'yes I am a feminist'.

*Tell me more about your time at university, how come you chose photography?*

I did photography; why did I do photography? I think I left school with very few GCSEs because I hadn't enjoyed school. I hadn't really gone to my lessons and I hadn't committed taking these exams and I was quite upset about that and so I went straight off to college to re-sit all of my GCSEs which I did. But hadn't enjoyed it as much as I hadn't enjoyed school and so I went into full time work and while I was working I just, kind of then, decided that my life should obviously take a direction, you know, I can't just, you know, jump into full time work and not aim for anything that's not me and so I was, kind of starting looking into what I enjoyed and kind of directions I wanted to go in and art was something that always interested me. It has always [been] something that I looked at and kind of wanted to know more about and so, but I never had a natural artistic talent. I can't really paint or draw or anything like that so it seemed obvious to me that to pick up a camera and learn to use it was, although there is a very definite artistic side to it if I didn't have that side, it's something that I can still learn so I decided to go along that route. And I did a short course at Camberwell College and loved it where I learnt to print my own pictures

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and that kind of thing and so from there I said 'yes this is something I wanna do'. But I did decide definitely to go into the art side, rather than just the, maybe the, commercial side of photography and so I started that by doing [a] BTECH in art and design to learn the foundations of art to try and kind of figure out how people draw and how people paint even if I couldn't do it and then from there I went into photography as a fine art at college in Derbyshire [although] I do actually wish I stayed at Camberwell college of Arts. Although I kind of enjoyed my time there, I think I would have got more out of my time at Camberwell but I still feel like the photography was an amazing thing to do, you know. But yes I very much enjoyed that.

*And what sort of photography were you doing, you mentioned taking naked pictures of yourself, can you tell me more about this style?*

When I say naked pictures of myself I wasn't doing pornography [chuckles]. What I was doing was, I mean I started off obviously in the first year doing kind of all different kinds of experimental things and I found myself looking mostly at female photographers just because it was their work that appealed to me most and eventually, I found myself looking more at me while I was kind of questioning what my interests were and why I was doing things. Not that I found my interest for me [?] but while I was trying to analyse what they were, I was just looking at myself so much that I thought I should incorporate that into my work and so I ended up, the majority of my work being self-portraiture; about trying to discover myself. I think a lot of that was led by the fact I lost my mum when I was 19. She died of ovarian cancer and so that's something that obviously affected me a lot and I think I took about 5 years to actually mourn her, for it to come out, so at the time when I was doing this work it actually helped me rediscover myself, you know and kind of delve into the depression surrounding that I had and help me deal with a lot of things and I think that self-portraiture in that way for most artists, that I looked at. It is that kind, you know, that question of just not only knowing who you are but who could you be and do you wanna be, and who do you want the world to see, and I just think that's, you know such an amazing thing. And to be able [to spend] my time at university doing that you know, was kind of a double whammy. I got this time to do this self-discovery and figure out who I am and explore my feminism at the same time as doing this degree and figuring out my photography and my loves of art and things like that.

*And have you kept up your photography?*

No [chuckles] not really. I do take pictures of my little boy all the time and occasionally I try and make them a little bit artistic. But when I left university I realised that I wasn't the world's best photographer and although I have all this interest in photography my skill base wasn't really there and so I actually became a photographers' agent instead. I went to work with a company that looked after a number of photographers and I really enjoyed that side because looking at photographers' work and promoting that work to advertising companies and things like that and getting to work quite closely with that and going along with the studios and seeing them being taken and having that whole process and being involved in the area of it rather than kind of that high pressure photography because it's such a difficult field to get into as well, you know. I wouldn't [have] stood [a] hope and so,

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yes, so I didn't really keep up the photography. From then, I still have a camera and as I say I take pictures of my son all the time and I do every now and again feel very embarrassed at my snapshots and try and get like a little arty shot like my belly bump instead [chuckles].

*Well that was a great shot.*

Thank you [chuckles].

*So what was the name of this photographers' agency that you worked [mic feedback noise].*

Holton and Stephen's.

*And how long were you there for?*

Just over a year. Unfortunately I was working there just before the recession really started to hit and with it being advertising something that's been hit quite at the fore front of the recession and they were a small agency as well they only had a few photographers on their books, quite a few left just before then, as well so because of that unfortunately they had to make me redundant.

*Just to go back [mic feedback] to your time when you went to university, you went to school after doing your GCSEs [?] you went to work rather than, you know, continuing education, what was it like that period of your life?*

Umm, I don't know. It was an odd period. My mum had cancer [baby voice in the background]. Just then she'd just been diagnosed and she died kind of when I was, she suffered from it for a year and then I think, 'what was I doing?'. I was still kind of finishing college when she was diagnosed and I left home already and so my mum was kind of doing her chemotherapy and stuff and then she died just as it was, I [baby voice in the background] started my first full time job as a core escort officer for Securicor [baby voice in the background] do you want to try again, yes?

*OK we just took another small break. So how old was your mum when she died?*

She was 42 I think and I was 19 so she was very young and again with my pregnancy and stuff like that, that was something that plagued me, you know something like that. There are other members of our family that have died of the same thing and because of that you know that was something that always played on my mind. I had polycystic ovaries which made it difficult for me to get pregnant and something I have been aware of and so you know I was very grateful to get pregnant because there was always the chance that I might not.

*You mentioned other members of the family had ovarian cancer?*

Yes I think two of my great aunts but I can't be 100% about that because we are not in touch one of the has died and one of them I don't really speak to anymore but there's talk in my family that was that.

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Where are you from originally?

Originally UK [chuckles].

*I mean whereabouts in England?*

Oh always London, my great grandfather was adopted into our family and he's very dark skin so we've got some kind, of I don't know what, background in there somewhere. But all of my family for the last generations have all been through London literally a stone's throw away from where we are sat now. I was born 10 minutes down the road in King's College Hospital. My great grandparents lived just over the road so we are very kind of [baby voice in the background] stuck specifically to this area [baby voice in the background].

*And just to try and capture what was going on at the time when your mum got sick, were you living together or close by at the time?*

No she was fairly close by, but I [had] left home already. I left home quite early and I was living actually, I think she was going through her chemo and stuff, I was living in Kensington and she was kind of around this area. But when she was ill she was staying with her best friend who kind of nursed her through her illness and that was in Orpington so it was quite far away but I still saw her all of the time and tried to be there when I could.

*And have you got brothers and sisters?*

No I'm an only child.

*And how about your father?*

My dad lives in Southampton on a boat and he's quite happy there. They split up at the time so my dad didn't have anything to do with her illness. I think much to his upset, because he you know quite missed my mum and he wanted to be there for her, but I think after my mum's death, what me and my dad did become a lot closer, I think, which I think my mum would have been pleased about because she really kind of wanted that for me. But yes I was always very close with my dad throughout my teenage years [which] kind of made me throw tantrums and we fell out around that time. But I think that through my mum's illness we became a lot closer after that.

*OK thanks for sharing that with me. Just to bring you back to your interest in art, you mentioned that you really like Gormley's work because of the public element in it, can you tell me more about that?*

Well I just like the fact that he involves the public so much, you know, a lot of art they produce pieces that go into galleries that only art lovers would go and see, whereas Gormley kind of not inflicts it. But he does put himself upon the public so that you know they are forced to face this piece of work and decide what they feel about it. There's statues that he had across London and across the UK where they were on roof tops and bridges and things like that, was absolutely amazing and you know I

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mean [baby voice in the background] much to his delight people know his name because of things like that and because of the Angel of the North. You know, it's these things that people can't avoid, that people are forced to kind of face the fact that art is a part of their life and kind of have an opinion about it. You know 10 or 20 years ago you wouldn't really [have] had public pieces of art that people would have discussed. You know, people would walk past the bronzes in Trafalgar Square and just see them as a statue. They wouldn't consider the art element of it, you know it would just be this, you know, declaration towards some big kind of kernel of the past or whatever and I love the fact that he makes us be aware of the art in our environment and you know by being aware of his work, I hope it could make others more interested in art and seek it out, but for people that aren't you know, they I suppose must look around them and question what is art [baby voice in the background].

*Now to look at the connection with the online audience of course you had your profile on the One & Other website and then of course on the Tommy website, the fundraiser site, how did that affect what you did and what you might have left out of your performance?*

Umm sorry can we just pause for one second?

Yes sorry.

Sure go ahead.

*OK we took another break as you were giving your baby something for his teeth right?*

His teething powder yes that's right.

*So just to talk about the impact of the online audience had [on] your profile on the One & Other site where you got lots of comments afterwards, but you also had your Tommy's profile beforehand, how do you feel having this sort of online interaction with people affected what you did and what you might have left out as well?*

[Baby voice in the background] sorry [chuckles] I think it made me more determined to do what I had originally said I did once I've said that I'm going to do something it's very hard to turn around [and say] 'actually I'm not going to do that', I also had a couple of pages on *Facebook* and so I have sort of maybe 200 people in my contact list on *Facebook* and so knowing that all of those had seen what I'd said, I was kind of committed to do it. I had some problems arranging the thing I said that I would do. It took me a long time to find the naked suit that I wanted and the helium for the balloons, the company that I was kind of hoping to buy the helium off or rent the helium off were really rude to me and they were really horrible when I phoned them up and they just had no interest in helping me out whatsoever and I would have paid full price, but because they were so rude I just didn't want to use them anymore and then thankfully one of my friends who runs a childrens' play centre in Surrey Quays she actually loaned me free of charge their helium canisters for their balloons that they use and she was an absolutely god sent and she [baby voice in the background]

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also provided the face [baby voice in the background] paints that we used to do the portrait of my son on my stomach. So she was brilliant [baby voice in the background], Laura Spencer, her name is [baby voice in the background]. Excuse me, shut up and yes [chuckles] that was an absolute god send. That was all very last minute [baby voice in the background], that came through as well [baby voice in the background]. Yes so I think the kind of online interaction just forced me to do what I originally said I would do. I think if nobody had known, I might have well changed my entire idea [at the] very last minute and gone out there and done something completely different [baby voice in the background]. But I didn't want [to] let myself down by doing something completely different to what I said I would do Yes [chuckles].

*OK thank you. So just really bringing you back to the experience as a whole, do you think it changed you in any way?*

Umm [pause], yes and no. I mean I don't think it changed me as a person, but I think it very much helped me to, I can't think how to word it, to have the strength of my convictions. You know, to kind of publicly declare that means you have to mean it, you know you have to be able to stand up for what you believe in once you told the world you believe in it and, you know, I do think it gave me that strength and, you know, the courage to do it ,to do it so publicly and, you know, now everybody knows that my time on the plinth was attached to my *Facebook* page so that anybody [baby voice in the background] can see it. So you know I faced questions from friends that asked me all the time and, you know, I have to believe in what I'm telling people. I believe in, you know, I have to know about that [baby voice in the background]. You are so noisy [talking to the baby].

*OK so we've taken another break and you have given the baby to your husband.*

I've got shot of him yes [chuckles].

*And really this last part of the interview is very much about reflecting on the impact of the experience on yourself and your family and friends.*

OK.

*And perhaps this particular charity as well so if you'd like to talk about these three elements?*

Umm where to start I don't know. I suppose doing what I did, I did it partially in tribute to my son obviously coming into the world, it was kind of an announcement of his intention of intended birth and also I wanted to do something to kind of shout about things I believed in publicly for him to see one day for him to know about these things that I believe in and how important it is to stand up and tell the world what you believe in and to do something about it. You know, it's all very well and good to have these beliefs but unless you do something about them you stand up for what you believe in then, you know, you haven't really got a society, you've got individuals. You haven't got you know this community and so I think by doing that I've kind of left this not legacy, but you know [chuckles] kind of mark for my son to see for him to

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know kind of who I am. Especially if something was to happen to me before he was old enough to teach him my ideals and what I believe in and so I think that, you know, in that sense on my son and on my family I definitely kind of have done it for the mark on them.

*And how has it affected your family?*

Umm I don't think it has affected them as such, you know, it's just kind of perhaps the effect it will have on them, you know, hopefully it will have this effect on my son. For me, my family is my husband and my son and I do have my dad but I don't see him very often. Obviously I lost my mum so my family is very much my immediate family. I don't think necessarily my time had an effect on anyone perhaps if I had gone up there naked they may have more to say about it but as it stands, I think that he'll think I'm a little bit crazy but I think they always knew that this was the cherry on top so yes I don't think there was much of an effect but I know they are proud of me doing something so publicly that I don't think a lot of them would even consider doing.

*And how about this Tommy's charity, how did your performance affect [interrupted]?*

Umm they are quite a big charity anyway so I think mine was just a drop in the ocean for the amount that they do for people and the amount that people do for them. You know I feel good to know that I've hopefully made a small difference for them, you know, they've got this kind of extra funding and they've got this extra acknowledgement from the public of what they do. I hope that some people went on there and investigated more about the charity and about kind of the broad aspect of things that Tommy has helped with and how they became founded and that people just keep in mind the darker side of pregnancy and these issues that can go wrong I hope that, I mean for the most part, most people are very lucky with their pregnancies and I hope that maybe makes them appreciate that.

*OK thank you.*

That's OK.

*I wanted to ask you more about your time at university, you mentioned about your degree [that] in retrospect was a way to make sense of losing your mum.*

Yes I think I used it for that. I did, I think to be to be fair, I was very much looking for a way to do it. I kind of used, I didn't acknowledge her death for a long time, I kind of brushed it under the carpet and kind of carried on with my life and I think anybody that's done that will know it becomes like a bubbling pot and at some point you know you have to deal with that and I got to that point when I was at university and I could have very well backed out of university and run back to London and you know hid my head under the carpet again but I stayed and I dealt with it and you know I think looking at the strong figure that my mum was in my life led me to the things I did in my degree you know effectively to my time on the plinth eventually. I mean I would say that was very linked to a lot of the work that I did. It was very similar in a lot of ways and I think you know I've very much discovered more about our relationship and kind of who I am because of that relationship.



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*So what was your mum like?*

Umm, she was a great woman but [chuckles] we were very similar and so a lot through my teenage years, I was very stubborn teenager, so I wasted a lot of time with my mum being a sulky, stubborn teenager and I didn't get to know her as well as I could. I think that was part of the thing that I was coming to terms with whilst kind of discovering our relationship. I mean my mum was a very strong independent woman. She very much stood up for what she believed in and, you know, she was a great role model for me. It was just unfortunate [that] I couldn't really see that or appreciate that when she was here to give it to me. I think you know that can become more apparent when you have a child and your mum is not there. Luckily I've got friends that are going through the same thing. My best friend had her son 4 months before I did and she lost her mum about the same time I did and so I think we did speak a bit about how she felt about that and so I was a little bit kind of forearmed about how it might feel when it came down to it. But I think, yes I would have liked to have known what kind of grandparent my mum would have been and I would like to know more about what kind of parent she was to me because although I still have my dad, men are absolutely useless at remembering small details and facts about things like that so he can tell me the big things but the little things you know a girl really needs her mum for and I think that you know I just you know her influence on me as a parent would be a very good thing as well you know I feel I do feel her influence in a lot of the decisions I make in things I could imagine she would have done and that I've heard from other family members she would. But I can only wonder what her direct influence would have been like.

*Do you know much about her life?*

In what sense do you mean?

*About her growing up, what she did, about her parents?*

Yes, I mean her mum died a year after her and I was very close to them. I lived with them for a while. I know some of her best friends are still alive and she has friends of hers since they were about 12 so a lot of those teenage years I get can [?]. Her brother is still here so kind of from the childhood I have that, I mean, she had a tough upbringing herself. Her father used to be an alcoholic and would beat up her mother and she witnessed it, experienced it, and I think that helped shape kind of how strong she was, to be in the face of something like that. So yes, I do know stuff [chuckles]. I know bits about her life. But I don't know kind of what helped shape her [to be] the person she is. I don't know, I know bits and pieces about who she is. You know I have someone from each area of her life I can turn to and ask questions about and you know they do speak openly and warmly about her.

*And what kind of art did you produce that helped you resolve some of these issues when you were at university making sense of her death?*

Umm, the art I produced, the end result wasn't necessarily what found me answers or helped me resolve it. I think it was my research along the way looking into different

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artists and different women and about the things that they had been through and why they produced the art that they produced and then kind of questioning how that reflected on me and what I could do within that would reflect in my work in areas of me. I mean there were pieces where I reflected on specific artists whose names are completely out of my mind. I've been trying to remember the names throughout this entire interview. I think I [have] still got 'baby brain' and I just [find] names are completely obliterated. But you know I would copy work of Cindy Sherman, for instance, who would take on other personalities. She kind of did these film stunts where she became someone else and kind of covered up who she was whilst still being there beneath it and I think that was quite significant for me because the works were a mask for me where I was covering up the pain and the mourning I had underneath and about how that came out and I really want to think of the name of this other artist... there was just one artist and she was so significant in my work and I just can't think her name at all [chuckles] she was a Mexican woman, do you know her name?

*Frida Khalo?*

OK thank you. It was on the tip of my tongue [giggles]. She was so influential in my work. I loved her independence. I loved how she was so strong about who she was so combining that with Cindy Sherman's work about how she was hiding behind and with me trying to find out who I was and this kind of significance of who she was, you know, I very much kind of embraced that. It was a painting that Frida did that was her and her husband sat in a chair and I loved that because although it was kind of looking at the influence of her surroundings had on her, at the heart of that picture was everything that she was and a lot of my work kind of came from that. I mean my nudity came into it when it was about me kind of discovering what it meant to be a female and about what that means in the outside world and about the symbolism attached to that. I kind of used things like Aphrodite as kind of the symbolism of kind of everything it should be to a female but how you look at that in a modern perspective and about how women have been viewed and possibly objectified through the ages and how they've been this kind of amazing symbol of who they were but they've been downtrodden and now we are kind of trying to raise that back up and all of these things along the way. But I think the way that connected to my mum was finding where my strength came from and why I feel that this strong woman should be kind of how every woman should be and how women should be viewed. I think that comes directly from my mum and the fact that she wasn't necessarily, she wasn't, oh I don't know, I can't ask her, but I wouldn't say she was a feminist as such, she was just very confident and happy with who she was and you know that's very important because I think that's one of the things of feminism if you compare it to another prejudice such as racism I think that the way you will eventually get over racism is not by the promotion of you know other races it's by normalising and that's the same like feminism. If I act like a normal strong female, there's nothing I need to stand up and scream about. That, this is the way it should be and it's very normal then hopefully at times it will become normal and I think I still use that now with things like my breast feeding; you know breast feeding in public can be quite a daunting thing. You know people look down on it. You get looks from people, people tend to be quite embarrassed about it. But it should be a very normal thing. It's been here for as long as we have, you know there was no other way to do it before a few

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hundred years ago and you know I'm very much embracing that as well. With the problems I had in hospital, I demand my right to breast feed anywhere I want. You know the media has been throwing up a lot of problems with women finding it difficult to breast feed in public and I'm training at the moment to be a breast feeding peer counsellor so that I can support these other women who may have problems initialising their breast feeding but also they may find problems in public with these archaic views that obviously breasts are a sexual implement and not for feeding their children. You know there are ridiculous views out there and I just want to stamp them all out personally [chuckles].

*So you are training to do this as a career?*

It's not a career as such, although it could be kind of progression to career at the moment it's a voluntary position within Southwark Council. It's an initiative Southwark Council are doing and we run things like breast feeding cafes which are open to all women whether you breast feed or not. If you have questions about breast feeding that kind of thing and women come along there and they can resolve anything and it's also a social thing so women can meet up and just kind of support each other in any way they need and we have midwives and [incomp], but we also have breast feeding peer counsellors for people that are currently breast feeding and can help you on a kind of one-to-one basis of what it's like to be a breast feeding mother away from that kind of that medical kind of thing that midwives and the [incomp]. It is all more of a low level one-to-one thing and it was directly because of them that I managed to get through the kind of problems that I had so I'm kind of very grateful for them so I wanted to give that back as well.

*That's fantastic.*

I hope so. I've got to get through it first. I mean I'm on month one of three months so it's going very well. It's very interesting [giggles].

*And what would you say is important to you right now in your life apart from your child?*

Apart from my child, I don't know. I can't think outside of that bubble really. I think for me, I mean, I am one of these people that's completely enveloped in my child's life. I think for me the most important thing is to make sure that my child and any subsequent children grow up with strong views and values that I have. You know I would be devastated if my boy grew up to kind of look down on women and didn't see them as equal, you know. This is my thing, to normalise you know this equality but through my children now and by doing that they can go forward and do that for me. But alongside that, it's also this kind of human rights thing, you know, although I've always been interested in these things I can't say that having my child hasn't just exploded beyond all belief, you know, I think I very much put my head in the sand with things before and now things like my right to breast feed in public is something that I'm actively fighting for, things like I've given up any chocolate that isn't fair trade, this is very recent, but I've been made aware of kind of the amount of child slaves that are out there; 12,000 child slaves that are known in the Ivory Coast to produce chocolate and that's as well as the hundred thousand child work force that are doing

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it and I just, I think probably because I've got a child I now couldn't imagine my child in that circumstances. It's just not right. You know, there's nothing right about that so I've kind of banned it all from my life and you know I'm going forward to try and make a difference [chuckles].

*Thank you.*

Unfortunately [giggles], I miss chocolate [giggles].

So I hope you've enjoyed the interview today.

*Yes I have. Amongst its little problematic things, I hope they weren't too much for you [the baby talk in the background].*

That's absolutely fine, don't worry and thank you very much.

*That's my pleasure, thank you.*

**END OF RECORDING**