

One & Other Project

My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here to interview Eric Page today on the 9th of March 2010 at 3.30 p.m. and we are conducting the interview using Skype, so Eric how are you today?

I'm very well thank you.

And where are you?

I'm in Brighton Verusca, in Brighton in East Sussex.

Okay you are very lucky.

It's very nice here.

So I went through the profile that you had on the One & Other website because as we mentioned previously your recording was not saved properly so we don't actually have a pre plinth file for your time on the plinth. So in order to get to know you I had a look at the profile and I was really interested in seeing the way in which you described yourself.

Okay.

You talked about being funny, being cruel and being spectacular.

Yes well we had three words to describe ourselves. I just thought actually how I can put myself in three words, it's very difficult, so I just went through my profile and thought you come across as a bit of a natty maniac who likes to be the spectacle with the three words I chose.

So just to bring you back to the time on the plinth, do you remember how you were feeling before you went up there?

The actual morning? I was very excited. I think I watched it a little bit online obviously I had been following the project but that morning I had been up very late the night before because I stayed with some friends in London to try my costumes out to make sure that I could change in an hour and that I could put them on in the right way that kind of thing. So I'd been up till about four so I was slightly hung over it was very early to be in London I think you had to be there by half past eight, I had a little bit of a gr p in the morning if I'm honest. So I was suddenly thrown into the Artichoke office full of these very happy well-adjusted and incredibly efficient and pleasant people in a bit of a gr p. But I was excited yes and relieved that the weather was so good because it had been raining the day before so I was rather dreading that I would be up there in the rain but you know I was kind of excited and a bit thrilled and I don't know expectant as well. I'd been to see the plinth a couple of times and I reversed my idea that it was a platform so to speak for performance, which was my original idea, but actually when I realised it was quite the opposite, that it removed you from performance, that you were looked at but you couldn't engage, it was very difficult to engage with anybody and I kind of reversed my idea that it was some kind of place to have fun and realised that actually I'd be fairly isolated up there and whatever I did

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would expose me and whereas I'd gone down the line of, you read my profile about looking to go through performance and what it is to put a mask on and remove that mask and be vulnerable in an *arty farty* kind of way, I suddenly thought actually I'm going to be up there on my own for a whole hour which is a long time. So there was a sense of trepidation as well of whether I could last a whole hour really and I've got a slight touch of vertigo so I wasn't particularly looking forward to being up a couple of metres on a stone plinth in a pair of heels which I knew I had in my bag; so yes a little bit of excitement, a little bit of worry, overall I was looking forward to it, I really was.

And then when you were up there, what happened?

From the moment I went up there it was a little bit windy which was fine and then it, you know, suddenly I'm there, I had all the lead up and preparation and then within minutes I'd been up on the cherry picker thing and I was up on the plinth and I suppose for me the plinth and other moments of my life whether I am actually that person whether I will actually do that thing or whether I won't and I like to put myself into situations where I can't back down in a way. I suppose it's because I'm a coward and I believe having my back to the wall makes you very brave because there's no way further back to go. So I was feeling a little bit anxious, especially because the dress, which was the first thing I went to wear, would only just fit me, and I'm really glad I tried that on the night before because I could have had to struggle into it, in the full view of the web otherwise.

But once I got started, because I timed it and I had the music, I just had to take my microphone off because I didn't want anyone to listen to me talking to myself and mumbling and all the things you do when you're kind of on your own. And I also wanted music to be my soundtrack, if you will. So I'd selected quite a bit of music for the hour, mostly classical stuff. And I didn't want it to be me talking or talking to the crowds, or talking to myself. I wanted it to be a musical backdrop. So it was kind of, kind of like a thing, like an hour's worth of, I don't know, an hour's worth of watching somebody privately, but public. It's kind of contradictory in a way. So when I got started initially, I was a little bit awkward. I'd ... my original plan was to scatter lots of seed, so I could pull in lots of pigeon, well I wanted to do was, and I'd taken about four kilos of birdseed up with me, which in the first couple of scenes, you can see me scattering, but there was a hawk in the square that morning that was driving the pigeons away. And I'd spoken to the hawk man, and he was like 'no, I'm paid by the council and we can't get rid of the pigeons' because to me, Trafalgar Square is pigeons, it's come part of part of what the Square's about. So I wanted my entire performance if you will, or costume changes, to be surrounded by swirls of thousands of pigeons that I would feed throughout the hour.

So the first couple of minutes, when I threw handfuls of seed, quite a lot of seed, there were no pigeons at all, because of the hawk. So I then covered the plinth in a covering of seeds, and hard slippery rolling things, like bellbirds, but I had to put a pair of heels on, four-inch heels on and suddenly realised that I'd actually made a rod for my back, because the whole plinth was a slippery nightmare at that point. And I was staggering around in these heels, desperate not to slip on the seed. So although I was ... I appeared to be quite comfortable and getting into the stride of it, I was also

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a bit worried that I might trip and slide off. Once I put my first costume on, which was the kind of Las Vegas showgirl outfit, I got into it and I quite enjoyed it, and it was, the sky was particularly beautiful that day. I remember the clouds and looking out over London and then I just thought well I'm here, might as well enjoy it and go for it. I kind of abandoned myself to the hour if you will.

I just watched your performance this morning actually, and I was going to ask you how you came up with the idea?

The idea of what I was going to do? I'd made a pact last year with a friend of mine, *Jits* who is the gentleman who made the costumes for me, and we'd agreed that whichever one of us got up onto the plinth, the other one would support and help him, and luckily, luckily for me, *Jits* was a cost ier, whereas I'm more of a kind of ideas person. So when they mailed me back and said you've got a place, what would you like to do, I sat down with *Jits*, and we talked about what I'd like to do and I said well actually, I'd like to, it to be a journey through myself if you will, from a kind of extravagant showmanship of front, which is all about artiness and creativeness, and also mask of creation, kind of hide yourself behind the outfit, ending up, at the most vulnerable position I could think of, and for me, that was possibly being naked in a public space, without reason. On my own for instance and I thought certainly for a man, that was the most vulnerable situation you could be in. So when I talked to *Jits* about that, he said well let's work it through a series of different costumes, starting in stereotypes, because I'm, obviously I'm a gay man, that's on my profile, so kind of drag, it's a performance front I suppose gay men have used for a very long time. It's also very powerful, and when you're in a form of drag, you become a monster type creature. You're taller, you're wider, you're more spectacular and I also wanted to hop back to the kind of idea that there were pigeons there, so all the feathers in the first act, it was supposed to be surrounded by thousands of pigeons, of course, which never came about.

So I suppose my, my ideas were based on performance, but not a performance, but what it is to be a performer, if that makes sense. And how to strip away those layers, back to actually who I was. , sounds very pretentious, but the other, you know, it was supposed to be funny at the time. And then also to kind of hark back to different things that Gormley himself had done. So a couple of my outfits were kind of, kind of referencing his stuff, the angel in the north and that kind of thing. And also, I remember a year or two ago, there was a statue called *Ece Homo* on the plinth. There was a naked man standing right on the edge of it, and I wanted to emulate other things that had been on the plinth before. So I wanted to be naked because of the Alison, not Alison Steadman, the Alison Lapper statue that had been there last year. I wanted to reference some of Gormley's stuff, because he uses the naked form all the time in his own sculptures and I wanted to kind of take the piss very, very slightly out of the utter pretension to nudity. I was hoping, really hoping, that nobody had gone naked before me, and they didn't thank goodness.

I suppose the idea was that I would end up as a nude statue, which is the only statue where you can see male nudity without being offensive or so-called obscene. So the idea was to be serious, but in a kind of ironic way. To take the, to enjoy myself, to challenge people by using silliness, which I do all the time, and to, yes be

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spectacular I suppose, in a space that's very formal, and about us as a culture recognizing our heroes, and I just wanted to, not undermine that, I wanted to just say, well actually people are here in a different ways, and it's not just about generals and kings and kind of fighting people. You can be brave just by being stupid sometimes, which I wanted to be.

So did you ever do any performance before that time?

Yes, I've done lots of different performances; so I've got my serious job that I do, but I've also done stand-up comedy for quite a while, so I'm used to being on stage and exposing myself. And initially my idea was to use the plinth as a place to perform. Was when I went to look at it for the first time, when I realised how difficult it was to engage with the audience. I thought actually that's not going to work, it's going to make me look a little bit desperate and needy, especially if there was nobody there, so I, I kind of flew the other way. So I'm not, I'm not too worried about performing. I mean I'm quite happy to be in front of people. Usually it's an intellectual exposure when you just stand there, you talk about yourself and your pain and your observations, so yes, I'm not that shy in, in being in front of people. I've normally got an audience, with the plinth, it wasn't a guarantee of that, other than on the web of course, which isn't neither here nor there I think because you can't physically interact with them. Yes so I've performed before, I've done some film, some television stuff. , but I don't take that seriously. That's my, that's my hobby if you will. I'm very lucky to be quite good at it.

So when did you become involved in stand-up comedy then?

Oh many, many years ago. About seven or eight years ago I think. I had a friend who was a comedian herself and I used to go and give her lots of ideas and quite enjoy it and I was quite arrogant about how funny I was, and then one, one day she dragged me up on stage to be funny, because I was so funny, and I died on my ass, and I realised that actually comedy was about hard work, rather than about just standing up and being funny. Because everyone can make everybody laugh, yes so I, but actually what I enjoyed, I did make a couple of people laugh that day and I enjoyed the feeling that I could make people laugh in a formal way just by talking about my own observations. So I spent a year working very hard, doing dodgy comedy clubs, and eventually, kind of broke few and got, not successful, but certainly you know got gigs and was working and quite enjoying it. And it's a very, it's very interesting space, comedy, because people think, again it's very brave, you know, you must be so brave to do it. But actually, the lights are on you, you've got a microphone in your hand, people are paying to be entertained by you, as long as you done the work, there's no bravery in that, I don't think and I, I don't know, I enjoyed being able to challenge people about how they perceive I was, because of course people are looking at you and make their minds up very quickly, and then and what you can suggest. And also, unfortunately in our culture, unless you're crazy, the stand-up comedy is one of the few places where you can actually just speak the truth these days. You can stand on stage and say horrifically honest or cynical stuff, that's true, and you don't get badgered for it you know, apart from politics, which is a lot about hypocrisy and standing in the street with a placard, which is kind of edge of madness, there aren't many places in our culture where you can really speak the truth about how you see it and have people listen to you. And I've always wanted to

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be a bit, a bit honest I suppose. I come from the kind of Bill Hicks comedy school of brutal cynicism that's wrapped in warmth really.

Sorry, are you still doing comedy at the moment?

I still perform yes, I still write. I write for lots of people now I particularly enjoy kind of musical comedy because I'm lucky that I've got quite a lot of friends who improvise very well with music, and most of my, most of my comedies I've tend to be writing for other people at the moment, because my serious job takes up a lot of my time. But I still keep my hand in, and I quite like it. Yes, once you've had a touch of the stage, it's very difficult to let it go. I was in a comedy club on Sunday, when I went up and did five minutes, just kind of old jokes, but, I like it, I do really like it. It's, it's also a place where you have to get rid of your ego. You can go on stage and people think, oh yes you know you're really arrogant, but if you have got an ego, people sense that and it's, it's so noose I think, and very quickly I think your ego will strangle you on stage. You have to just give it up and be very vulnerable. I've often, when I've been the most open and vulnerable on stage, talking about my you know kind of stuff that's really hurt me physically or emotionally, people find it very funny and it's damn sight cheaper than, than therapy.

You talked about the ego, or the ego-less, of going on the plinth, you said on your profile. That's okay, 'ego is in the eye of the beholder.'

Yes.

But not the eyes in the eye in the face, but the I, as in ...

No the I [inaudible] yes, but that's just a joke really I suppose, it's my, it's the way I like to write. I like to write things that have got two or three levels to them, so that there's the pun on the eye of the beholder, but actually the ego is about me, isn't it, and I am the rest of it. But I also wanted to, I suppose on the plinth, I wanted to be extraordinarily ego-static, you know I'm standing there, I can dress what I want, I can bear myself, I can be honest, I can make statements, I can take the piss out of people, but I can also be very vulnerable at the same time. And that's, like in a knowing way I suppose. I'm the triumph of self-delusion I think, in many ways. I kid myself that I know what I'm talking about, and I don't a lot of the time.

Under name do you go, as a comedian when you go on stage?

My own name, Eric Page. Yes, so *Lilac Bonzai*, which is the name I used for the plinth, is kind of my, my internet name many years ago when I joined the internet, it's my, obviously it's my hot, it's my hotmail address, and I had a little lilac bonsai on my desk and you know when you have to make up your profile title and it just kind of stuck, so I kind of had a character when I first started doing stand-up, as *Lilac Bonzai*, but like a lot of characters, they are again, they are a mask and they stop you performing as yourself to a large degree. Yes.

Okay thank you. So just to bring you back and elaborate on some of the things we just discussed. You mentioned about these possible difficulty of engaging with the

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audience when you were on the plinth. You'd gone there before, you'd seen that, what other type of communication did you have with your online audience, for example, I noticed you had quite a few comments on your One & Other profile.

It's, the profile thing was really good because I wasn't expecting it to be I don't know, quite as, almost like a method of feedback in a way. So I had a lot of encouragement from people who said they were going to watch me. Most of them I didn't know, which was really nice. And then the, the comments, most of whom, actually, I had one negative one that I suspect was a bit of a joke. All the rest were, were really nice, really touching, and I remember logging in a couple of times and reading them, and some of them, really moved me. Various people had, had really enjoyed what I had done, and oddly enough, I ended up meeting one of the people and she had flown over from Canada to be on the plinth and just stood there with a picture of her parents who had died in her pocket, and had written to me after mine, performance, saying how much she was inspired by it, and I'm quite, I don't know, and then on the last day of the plinth, when we were invited to London, she was there and she came over and I had the most lovely, spontaneous afternoon with her, and she was an anthropologist from Calgary I think, in Canada. Very, very interesting woman. So I actually made a friend out of, out of those comments. And I still kind of write her now, to, so all the kind of feedback stuff, certainly online, was an unexpected bonus I think. Very nice. And I'm glad people, I'm glad people got it you know, I'm glad people weren't offended by me, or didn't think I was being too trivial and just, just took it to face value which it was. And I suppose with the internet audience, I kind of watched a couple of people, because I'm a performer, I'd watched a couple of people before, so I knew where the cameras were and the best place to stand and those kind of thing, which is kind of sussing out the area.

And one of the things I really noticed was that the microphones picked up all that self-talk and the sighs and that, a couple of people looked, whose performances were really interesting, I thought were made to look a bit ridiculous by the microphone picking up all the bits and pieces, and that's when I thought, right if I'm just going to prance around in outfits, actually what I'd like is a backing track ideally, so I suppose I can't have the idea of we all have our personal backing tracks without ipods and our mp3 players... it's ubiquitous in a way. So I wanted to extend my backing track out into the square and also online. So that's why I made the microphone so close so that the only thing people online could hear was my music, so they had this kind of choice of music that I had that I knew it matched the outfits I was in, to become more of a I don't know, more of a show I suppose rather an art thing. Not quite passive as watching somebody thinking what they're going to do now, they can relax and just think ok, there's a bit of music, I can enjoy the music even if I don't like the outfit he's got. I had a very funny experience a couple of weeks ago where I was at the English National Opera to see Handel and when I was naked, I had a piece of Handel, which is 'Onto us a child is born', which is one of my favourite oratorio pieces, I particularly like opera, and then six months later, I was around the corner, in English National Opera, which is just, three four hundred meters from the plinth, and I hadn't really thought about the plinth much afterwards, after the initial week. And I was Handel, it was being staged, and the chorus, suddenly went into 'Onto us a child is born' kind of eighty people on stage. And I had a flashback to standing naked on the plinth. My skin went all prickly, and I kind of had this great big smile on my face and thought how odd that that piece of music which

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I'd loved all my life, has now become associated with, with the moments of, I don't know, a moment of bizarreness and exquisiteness, in my life as well, which I really like.

You know you mentioned, about being the first naked person on the plinth, how did you know that?

I'd planned to be naked all the way through, and I'd put that up in my profile, and I tried to make it clear that I wasn't going to be exposing myself. I was going to be, I was, I was exposing myself in a real way that I would, there would be nothing left, after all the outfits and the costumes, there would just be me. So after all the funny and the feathers and the drag, and the *burqa*, and all the rest of it, what you get at the end is just me, forty-year old, slightly plump, kind of gay man, who doesn't fit the stereotypes of what he's supposed to look like when you're a gay man, because you're supposed to be all buffed and all the rest of it. So I kept my fingers crossed that nobody else would go naked beforehand and because, I hadn't really got addicted to the plinth, but I kind of watched it on a daily basis, and see what other people were doing and it was in the news a lot, so I kind of knew who'd, who was going up and who wasn't going up and up until the day before, there's a woman on the weekend who said, weekend before me, who said she was going to strip off, but she didn't in the end, and I was really, I was really hoping that nobody would so I could be the first person if you would. I quite like being the first in many ways. And I wanted to do it on my terms so I kind of checked the site quite a lot and I'd kind of spoken to a couple of people who'd been watching it obsessively when my friend was on, on it, almost twenty-four hours a day, watching various plinth people and she kept me up to touch with who was doing what and where. So I kind of knew just from, from checking it out on the plinth really, what previous people had done.

So would you say that by watching what had been going on the website and the feedback from your friends had an influence on what you decided to do?

No actually, not at all. I'd already decided what I was doing before I started. So I'd worked out the costumes with Jits in May, he'd made them for me. I'd then chosen the music I think in June. I was up in July wasn't I? I was away for most of June, so I knew that I had to get it all sorted before I came back, so the only things that influenced me I think were watching it online for where people could be seen, so kind of where I should stand and where I should move to make sure that both, it would look good online but also be quite comfortable for me, on the plinth. I didn't want to be too close to the edge of the plinth if I could and also the sound thing, that was the main thing that influenced me. I suppose I was originally going to talk and you know kind of talk about me as a person as I was going through the various things and that was the major influence. I just dropped that and thought well, no I don't want to sound track to this, I just want to be visual. And musical. So in a way I was influenced by other people's performances or time on the plinth, but not, it didn't influence what I did or what I chose to do. I'd already decided on that.

Okay thanks, how much notice did you get about...?

Before I went up?

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Two, three, two and a half months I think. I think I applied ... I can't remember, I applied when it first opened, which might have been January or early February, and then they mailed us back end of April, beginning of May I think to say that I had a slot and then a week later I had a mail telling me where my slot was, which was in the morning in July, late July. So I had about two and a half months I think warning. And actually I had also, I shouldn't really say, I'd applied twice and I'd kind of looked at the sight, figuring out where people would apply from and geographic percentage and thought ok, I'm from the south east, there's a lot of people there, I'm from a very busy city, there's lots of people from Brighton, that will apply. My sister lives in the Shetland Islands, right up far north, on a tiny little island, so I applied from her address as well, thinking that if it was a selection process based on geographic location, then if I didn't get in in the south east, I could get in because there wouldn't be any gay men from the Shetlands that would apply. In the end of course I didn't need to because my original one, but once I'd come down, the second batch, they mailed me again saying would you like to go up again and I, part of me thought ooh yes I could do it again, do it all again, but in the end, I didn't. I'm really glad I didn't because it was unfair to somebody who, who would have had that slot.

Sure. So just to bring you back to the time when you were on the plinth, straight after, if you can try and bring you back to that moment, did you feel any different from the time just before you went up, as soon as you came down?

Straight after I'd finished? Oh yes, I felt exultant, you know, the people before me, who I'd spoken to, were a Methodist preacher and his congregation. He did a sermon from the plinth and the woman after me was a kind of very sweet old lady who knitted and I'd spoken to both of them in the room before hand and to me, that's the delight of the plinth, that actually there was a Methodist preacher before me, I did that all very bizarre things I did, then there was a kind of sweet old lady up afterwards and after I came off the plinth, I felt, I felt a one-ness, which is an odd thing, with all the other people that had been up there. I thought actually yes, there's only two thousand or whatever of us that done that, from all around the country and some around the world. So I felt part, part of that. But I also felt, I felt a little bit of relief that it had gone so well, that I hadn't got blown off, or it hadn't rained, hadn't gotten heckled or anything unpleasant happened. I also felt triumphant as I often do when I do things that challenge me, certainly on the nudity thing, because I wasn't so worried about the outfits, but I was a little bit concerned about being naked, as anyone rationally would be I suppose in the day. So I felt a kind of triumphantness, that I had being the person I'd set out to be. And often in my life when I've done very strange things, like the plinth, I've done a couple of things like it, it's about testing myself thinking I either am that person who I think I am, or I just think I am that person. And for me I have to do it, whether that makes sense at all, but it's about, it's about setting the bar very high, and going right Eric, this is what you've said you're going to do, now you do it, and you do it to your best ability, no matter what anybody else thinks. So I felt kind of proud and triumphant. I was on a high for most of the day, when I came down. And I was really pleased that I'd got through the hour and nothing dreadful had happened, and that I'd enjoyed it, and I did really enjoy it. Something really nice about being out there and having my own music. I remember when I was in the angel of the north outfit. I was I could hear the chimes of St.

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Martins Clock in the background and it was just, I had like a beautiful moment when the sun opened up on me, I could hear my music, and I was standing in this public square in London, dressed as a giant yellow angel. It was just, just nice. I like those moments. They don't necessarily define me, but they help me define myself, if that makes sense.

Thank you. Just to bring you back to the time when you came down, do you remember what people told you when you were talking to either people who had gone on the plinth or about to go, or people in the square?

Yes, just as I came down, I talked to, there was a couple of journalists there, a very unpleasant lady from the Telegraph who was very rude about me in the end. I didn't like her at all. And she interviewed me and wrote it up in the telegraph and described me as a cross-dresser up for the day from Brighton. I don't think she liked the plinth project and she picked lots of people who she could judge and her article was very negative about the whole thing, that it was a spectacle of uselessness and all the rest of it. But of course when she interviewed me, she was very pleasant and journalistic as they often are ... other than her, everybody else was lovely. The people that worked in the *Artichoke* were really nice, the woman who was going up before me who I'd spoken to was really excited, she was ever so sweet, I mean she was from Scotland. The, the gent, the Methodist preacher who I was surprised was even going to talk to me again after he'd seen what I'd done, was really sweet and came over and shook my hand and my friends obviously who were in the square really enjoyed and a couple of strangers who were there. So most people's reactions were very pleasant and the people that I physically talked to the minutes after the plinth other than that journalist, were really nice and supportive, I think.

Do you remember this article, when it came out, or the title of the article?

Yes, I do actually, not the title, if you want to look at it, it was the Telegraph. It would have been a couple days after I'd been up which was the end of July, it was a female journalist, it was about the plinth, basically, she picked six or seven people who contrasted, looked very odd, and she was being very dismissive about it. , and then she'd asked me some very nice questions about the THT and who I was doing it for and the charities I'd selected and that kind of thing. And then wrote me up like some kind of weird desperate tranny. I didn't like it, it was kind of touch of homophobia in it, she was very negative about the whole project and I don't know, as far as she's concerned, I felt a bit taken advantage of. To be honest, I was exuberant coming off the plinth and I would have talked to anybody and I should have been more careful. I normally am, but I'd assumed that because she was standing there, that she was a part of the project and she was okay. All the rest of the press stuff that I did, really positive, really nice.

Yes tell me more about the rest of the press, did you have more attention, media attention I mean?

Beforehand, yes I did, because the two charities I'd linked to, which I worked for, the Broken Rainbow, which is domestic violence charity for lesbian and gay people and the Terrance Higgins Trust which is an HIV organisation, I'd talked about them in the

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third, in between my mucking around, or when I have a serious moment and I'd like to use it to promote our services if you will because it's a brilliant, brilliant chant, and because I knew, because I knew that my costumes were going to be very good and I was going to be nude, so I kind of knew that I was going to get a lot of press, , and I'm not naïve about that kind of thing, and I suppose part of my eye was on press because I like a bit of publicity in many ways. So I'd spoken to the THT and the domestic violence people, the THT have a very good press department, so I'd given them so press stuff beforehand, did some photos and said you can press release this, and then it'll be yours so all the press stuff was written around me being a THT worker, which of course gets them more publicity. So even though I like the spectacle, at the moment, I'm not particularly hungry for the spectacle afterwards, somebody else can have that, and if they can milk it out of what I've done, then that's fine. , but overall, the interest that I had, the radio stuff and the TV, press was all very good, I really liked it. Then you know, it's not a great deal, I'm not very impressed by the telly people, it's very easy to stand there and talk rubbish for a couple of minutes and as long as they edit you in the right way, it was quite good. So I was pleased with the press coverage, but it wasn't the reason why I did it really. It was just, if you're going to do it, you might as well do it well I think.

Yes, just I'll just ask you a little bit more about that, because the interview will be deposited for research, future research at the Wellcome Library as well, so if somebody wanted to do more research about your choices, for presentation, they may want to look up these radio interviews or other interviews you've done, so could you tell me a bit more if they happened before or after and for whom?

Yes, I did some before, god if I can remember, I did some before, it was for BBC South, I think and for Radio Reverb and for can't remember the other one. I did some press interviews with ... I'm Welsh as well so I pressed release various magazines based on a being gay, b being Welsh, b being, you know it's kind of stuff, so I've done a lot for the gay press, the Pink Paper and Axiom and lots of the gay press that was out then covered me obviously because I was one of the first out gay men that were up there and very forceful about the reason that I was out. And then various of the mainstream press picked me up, I think possibly because of the nudity and also because of the outfits, so the South Wales Argus and the Western Mail picked me up the Avon Gazette I think, the Brighton Argus, the Telegraph and the Guardian covered it. The Independent had a piece on me, and then lots of stuff online, on the web. Yes. And then television stuff after of course, one other stuff, I did another interview on the BBC following that for South Today, which is one of their news shows, yes, I was quite happy with the amount of stuff I got. And they were all right with me.

Thanks, so just to bring you to the actual Broken Rainbow, the charity, did you say that you work for them as well as Terrance Higgins?

Yes, I work for the Terrance Higgins as a sexual health outreach worker so I'm physically employed by the Terrance Higgins Trust, and I go out and about and I talk about sexual health to MSM, which is Men who have sex with men, and I work in different environments, in clubs and bars, saunas, and cruising grounds but I've worked for Broken Rainbows, so I'm not employed by Broken Rainbow, but I've

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worked to promote them. So I've organised gigs with them in the past, I've worked very closely with them to ensure that they get a high profile and through my other job, which is not the Terrance Higgins Trust, but my hate crime job, because I work for the, a community safety team in Brighton that's around supporting victims of homophobia and racism and religious intolerance, that kind of thing. Of course domestic violence is part of that, so in that job, I work very closely with Broken Rainbow to raise the profile of domestic violence among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. So I've worked for them, but I don't work for them if that makes sense.

Yes.

I wanted, because ... because I wanted to have a serious moment in all the playing around, I'd spoken to Broken Rainbow, and I know the director of Broken Rainbow quite well and I'd spoken to her and said, this is an opportunity to get some national coverage, all I want from you is a t-shirt, a plaque, would you be interested in doing it? And they were really supportive and I'd said look, I am going to get nude, there might be some negative press, but actually they took a risk, as the THT did and went with it. And they were quite happy with the coverage they got. An awful lot of the kind of straight press, picked up the fact that I was a domestic, that I was, working for Broken Rainbow, or for the THT, because it was kind of a safe way to report the gayness if you will. Rather than saying a gay man was up on the plinth, they can say he worked for the Terrence Higgins Trust, which is a nationally recognized HIV charity, or broke, to give a kind of serious edge to something that might have been perceived as quite flippant. It also gave me a quite serious edge of course in case people criticized me for being a bit of a fool so it was a, it was a kind of cynical edge of making sure I had, a good reason for being up there as well as just indulging myself. And it was just it was a once in a lifetime opportunity to push causes that I work very hard for, very quietly, but in a very progressive way. And, certainly with the internet people that were watching it, I suspect lots of people had never heard of those charities before and I was hoping that even if one person rang up the charity after that then I'd done some good work.

Do you know if it increased any traffic to the Broken Rainbow website or the cause, have you had any way to find out?

I think Broken Rainbow fed back, they were very pleased with the response that they got, people were talking about it, they got awful lot of press coverage from it. I didn't ask them whether the, the amount of calls would have increased because that would have been a confidential thing to a degree, the nature of their work. The THT said it was the, the most coverage they'd ever got for a campaign nationally, and considering they have a media team that spend a fortune on promoting their work, mainly to a gay audience, for them, it was a coup because they got their message across national press in a way they wouldn't have been able to do, which is good so the THT themselves were very pleased with what I did. But I'd worked very closely with the media department and they'd sent their photographers there and they were very skilful at pushing it, so the images they promoted were of me, I think in the frock in the headdress, holding up their signs, which were good press pictures, they were colourful and odd. And the press like a good picture, but also promoted the THT in a

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horous, positive and progressive way. That's the stuff they like. So it wasn't too camp and it was kind of, it was gay enough that it wouldn't have put off the straight press, and it was odd enough that the gay press would have been interested. And it's kind of narrow. But I think overall they were both pleased with the stuff that they did.

And you know just to talk about the way in which you worked the Broken Rainbow into your performance, I saw you on the plinth with the placard and the t-shirt, how did you plan that into the overall changing of costumes?

I sat down and worked out how many costumes I'll need for an hour. And how much time I'd have to change, and then cut a hole in the middle of that kind of plan if you would and said right I have quarter of an hour in the middle of it and that's where I'll do the charity stuff. Also, so I did a kind of, I did two other things with the placard. One was a joke about the people's *plinthess*, which was a comment I'd seen on one other website, on the first day a woman had written in the Guardian about why doesn't somebody do the people's *plinthess*. I thought I'm just going to knock that and do it, because it's such a good idea, so I held up her quote that I'd printed off and her name, and was speaking to her, and she actually got in touch with me as well afterwards, which was really sweet. She was a journalist from the Guardian called Monica, can't remember her surname, Monica somebody or other.

I also held up a picture of a friend of mine who'd died a couple of years before of cancer, and his partner, they'd been very close friends of mine and I held a photo of James up and he would have loved that, he would have been on the square and supported me, and I knew his partner was going to be watching online, from Canada so I wanted to hold a picture of James just to make sure that it wasn't just about strangers, promoting strangers if you will, or work stuff, it was also about promoting somebody that was very dear to me. So I kind of sat down and I thought right, quarter of an hour, I'll go for the third quarter of an hour, from half past to quarter to, by which somehow I'll be relaxed, I'll have got some good costumes out of the way and because I wanted to reveal each costume as if it hadn't been seen before, I knew that three quarters of the way through I'd have a stock of costumes that I could put bits and pieces on which could make the t-shirt and the placard look very well. I'd asked Jit to use the colours of the THT, and Broken Rainbow in the costumes as well, so the headdress for instance has the THT colour and the Broken Rainbow colours in it. So I kind of had an eye for making things look very good and I packed everything up the night before so each costume is wrapped up in a tight roll so I knew, and they were numbered so I knew which time I was going to wear it and what I was going to do it on. I'm really glad I did that because it would have been chaos otherwise.

I also thought standing still and I think I'd worn the angel of the north outfit, the yellow thing before hand, which is quite difficult and quite tiring to hold the wings up perfectly still and it's also very, very tiring to stand still, in a pair of heels for that long, you know certainly when you're not used to it, wearing heels and it's not something I do every day. So it was also having a little bit of a break in the middle of all the costumes so I could walk around a bit, move my arms a bit, keep myself warm if I had to. Actually in the end it was warm enough so I'd kind of planned it for a break for me and to make sure that I could get as much coverage as possible for them by

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having a lot of different outfits with them on. And I'd also, from watching other people, I'd realised that about half way through, most people have run out of ideas of what to do on the plinth, and were sitting down, very bored, almost sitting down for the rest of the hour to go, and what I kind of thought ooh that hour is much longer than it looks, really, even though it's an hour, I suspect up there, it feels more like four hours, as five minutes does on stage, it can drag out, feel like a week sometimes. So I'd wanted the, the charity aspect to be a break for me, allow me to walk around a little bit and be a bit more relaxed rather than be standing there in my outfits.

Thank you, yes that's really wonderful. Well I've got a really important thing to ask you now, do you think it changed you at all, going on the plinth?

Did it change me? Change me as an individual, as a person?

Well it's up to you, I guess what I'm interested is in a kind of impact it may have had on you personally, on your friends, you've already mentioned the ngo's and charities you've been supporting, so I guess that had an impact as well, what about yourself and your friends?

My friends are used to me doing odd things like that and they're very supportive. Quite a few of them in the square that day. Did it change me? I'm a living work of art now I suppose, but I always imagined that I was before, in many ways [laughs]. I, I was reassured that even, even at the grand old age of forty-three, I can still be odd and do things that amuse nobody else but myself. Did it change me? I don't think it did. I was pleased by it, I, I really enjoyed it, but as soon as I came down, you know I had other things to get on with and to plan and it was done with. I don't, I don't know, I live in the moment, certainly in that kind of thing in many ways. So whilst I was up there, I was changed, yes, I was I was changed in many different ways. I don't think it altered who I was, I didn't make me feel any more profound, other than what I mentioned earlier, about feeling like I was a part of a group of people who'd all been up there. So in that way I was changed, that I felt that I was part of a group of a couple of thousand people and we, although we were all very different, we had that one thing in common that we'd all been up on the plinth.

And I met quite a few of them on the last day, who were really sweet and really nice and they were very different from me, and I suspect I wouldn't have met them in any other way at all. But we did have this very strong thing in common which we'd all spent an hour on that piece of granite. So I didn't, I didn't feel changed, I don't think, I don't think ... I don't think I made much impact in many ways, you know, I wanted to fill my hour with a bit of spectacle and for it to be fun. I didn't want it to be too heavy or serious, although I was doing a bit of charity, I didn't want it to be a very heavy physically thing. I just wanted people to be able to tune in and laugh or go past in a bus and see me and snigger and take a photo or sit for a moment and be transfixed by a nice outfit. I didn't really want it to change anything. So I don't think it did change me at all other than I enjoyed and of course every moment that we enjoy in our lives makes us more interesting people I think. What it has given me of course is a collection of anecdotes from the day and I really, really like anecdotes of what I've done and to be completely honest, the only reason I did it, and the only reason I wanted to do it, is that I can have a dinner party anecdote in twenty years time where

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I sit down and say yes, oh yes that time I was in Trafalgar square in a golden burqa and the people, and very often, the mad things I've done, like that, or the fun things have done, have been about the anecdote afterwards, being able to say oh yes I did do that, it was me.

Okay.

Yes.

Well I was going to ask you about the motivations and you have answered it. You mentioned about going there on the last day, which there was a kind of reunion of the plinthers.

Yes there was a big rally of all the people. I wasn't going to go, I'd been invited up by Sky people because they wanted to film some of the people that they'd liked. I was one of those people. So they'd asked me and a couple of other people to go up for the day to be filmed, during the last hour. So I'd arrived a bit early, I dropped off my outfit, I had the angel outfit with me, and then I sat, because I'm not very comfortable in groups of people. The people in the square, were I don't know, this is going to sound very snobby, but they were having a bit of a party, about how exceptional it was and I felt, I didn't feel what I'd done was exceptional, I just thought it was part of a whole process of stuff. There were a couple of very odd people there, who were a little bit obsessive shall we say, who I didn't like, there's a lot of television people there and Mister Gormley was there himself and what I ended up doing was kind of standing on the on the railings at the tops kind of watching it, looking down and then Lady Godiva, who was one of the women who had been naked, came up beside me. I hadn't met her before and she'd recognized me from the plinth, and she was like me, she felt that she'd done something for the hour but it wasn't something worth manically celebrating, as if it were the great high punch of your life. It was just another thing that she'd done. And I ended up having a coffee with her and her father, talking about being naked and how nice it was and that the people in the square who were, who were really celebrating it, it had obviously meant a lot more to them than perhaps it had meant to me and that sounds terribly snobbish and I don't mean it to sound snobbish but it was just, for me it was just another really nice thing that I'd done and that was a bit fun.

But I think for some of the people it might have been an extraordinary moment in their life that did transfix and transform them. And they were very brave to do the things they did. I didn't feel like that. So I felt, certainly on the last day, I felt like I, what's the right way of putting it, not I didn't deserve to be part of the party, because that makes me, like I don't value myself, but that I didn't I didn't personally value my time on the plinth as much as the people that were celebrating in the square did, and I didn't want to be cynical in the square when they were really enjoying themselves. I didn't want to go well it was only an hour and all the rest of it. Yes. So although I enjoyed it, it was nice to see the people, I didn't take part in that rally particularly. I was quite happy with that you know.

Okay.

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Though we all had a good time.

Yes, Eric, I just wanted to ask you one more thing about the plinth experience and then to take you more about your personal life really, your job and you know your aspirations and that kind of thing. You mentioned about this woman writing about your performance in a way in which you didn't like, can you tell me in your own words how you would have described your own performance?

I did describe it on my profile and I think I kept, apart from golding my body, which I said I was going to do, but it turned out to be too expensive to cover myself in gold, I described what I was going to do. It, it was a journey from stereotype, through to me, stripped of all pretension, physically stripped. I wanted it to be a journey through costume and mask and extravagance and all the kind of stuff we use to defend ourselves. When you're a gay man, you use stereotype all the time to move your issue and to defend yourself and to challenge people, and of course be I'm not a stereotypical gay man, of course nobody is, I wanted to be in a bit of drag but actually be quiet strong in drag and be magnificent, like a showgirl and I'm hardly the showgirl type, but I wanted to be that kind of sassy, spectacular image, and then move all the way through to kind of, kind of arty farty stuff with the various costumes. I put the golden *burqa* on because I knew I was going to be naked and because for me, the *burqa* was robbing everybody of being able to see me. Because when you're there, you're completely exposed and the golden *burqa* was about me being able to stand under the full gaze of the world and actually retain my modesty and privacy. So the *burqa* was about me preparing myself for being nude, because I knew that I was going to take my clothes underneath, and also the transformation from *burqa* to nudity was, was humorous for me, because it was from one minute of being completely covered up, and being completely modest, just my hands showing and then revealing myself in complete nudity. There's a touch of showmanship there I suppose.

But my main aim was a journey through the different ideas of costume and performance and silliness and masks and then the side that you never normally see, which is when you come off stage, which is the vulnerable side, the real side, the exposed naked side if you want to, I wanted that to be in the final part of my performance, so after working all the way through the various costumes, the bits and pieces, I wanted to stand there completely naked with no costume on, with no protection actually from the elements, or from people, and not jiggle around as if I'm being sexualised, but as if to say this is a man, this is what I am. So all the rest of it, is what I can be, should I wish to, but the nudity is about what I actually am. This is what I was born in, this is what I am, I can't hide any of this, and I'm not sexualising it, which is what people always think when they think of naked gay men. I wanted to say actually, nudity isn't obscene. Nudity is a part of, a part of what I am. And I suppose all the way through I wanted it to be artistic too, so I wanted to look, if somebody just happened to be looking past and they glanced up, they would see me quite static and have an idea of maybe what I was up to, that I was, you know, that I was pretending to be a work of art. I was mimicking a work of art, I was being myself, I just happened to be nude, there wasn't any reason other than me being there. Does that, does that make sense to answer your question?

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Yes, thank you. So now, I'm just wondering how you happened to live in Brighton from Wales, how did you get there?

I lived in Wales until I was about fifteen. My parents, which is quite unusual, had gay friends when I was younger, so when I was about fifteen, and obviously I was gay. I had my mother's gay friends who both are now dead, who died of AIDS about fifteen years ago, had suggested to my mother that perhaps if I went to college in England, I could go and live with them, my mother's very progressive in many ways, and I suppose when I came out to my mother, I was about fifteen and she said that she didn't know how to make me into the strongest gay man that I could be because obviously she was a, she was a married Welsh woman. So she suggested that I go to college in England and live with David and John, who I'd known all my life, and they would teach me how to be gay, if you will. And not in a sexual way, teach me how to be proud and strong and clever and funny and self-assured and self-confident in a way that straight people are taught all the time. I was very, very lucky.

So I left my little Welsh valley, it's very humble. My parents are working class and I still go back there, it's a very beautiful place, and David and John were incredibly wealthy, I had a huge house called Ludgeshot [?] Manor that was a medieval manor house in the country in Hampshire. So I left my little Welsh valley, then moved in with them in their palatial house and then went to college in Portsmouth. And finished my education and university in Guildford, so it was through them, it was through David and my mom recognizing that if I stayed in Wales, I might have had a difficult time. And this was, this was the late eighties, it was early Thatcherite, the miner strike was on, Wales was collapsing, there was no work, so what they were really doing was offering me an opportunity. And I think they, I think John, had spotted the fact that I had a bit of spark in me, the fact that I was a bit odd, and that might possibly turn inwards unless that was encouraged so to my eternal, eternal joy, I was given the opportunity to develop myself, to grow up as a gay teenager, in a space where I was completely accepted, which is really, really lucky, and when I talked to my friends who had a hell of a time, I recognized how lucky I was. And I suspect that's part of the reason I work for the THT, it's because I personally had a very easy time of, obviously I had some emotional difficulties, every teenager does, but I didn't have that crushing sense of shame and disgust and self-abasement that many younger gay people have.

So, so that's how I ended up in England and when I was in university in Guildford, I met a lot of friends, who are also gay, obviously I was building up my gay kind of friend network, mostly women, two of whom came down to Brighton to live and we came down for a weekend in the early nineties, I think. I don't know if you've ever been to Brighton, Verusca, but lots of people who come here for the weekend never go home really. So we came down the weekend. I had a lovely weekend. It was in the summer, it was beautiful, it was a busy town, and Guildford is very pretty but for a young gay man it wasn't very interesting. It wasn't very exciting and again this was in the mid nineties so the culture was changing. Brighton is of course a very famous gay city and the nice thing about Brighton if you're gay, is that it's not just about the sex and the bars, it's that half the city is gay, so the police is gay and the judges are gay and the taxi drivers are gay and women in the shops, gay and your post woman's gay, and you know people on the street are gay, and the girl that runs the

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deck chairs are gay. So you've got a feeling of acceptance in Brighton and each country has its own city like that I think for gay people, where the level of tolerance is much higher than it would have been. Of course now, most of the country has caught up to Brighton. I go back to Wales and the valleys and people don't have a problem with me at all. But then, you did often get homophobia and people were unpleasant to you so Brighton was the kind of place where, and still is, where you can be, you can be yourself a lot easier and about fifteen of us, my entire social group all moved down that year to Brighton so not only did I move to a wonderful new city, I also had a ready-made social group in it.

So I was very, very lucky. And that was sixteen, seventeen years ago and I've lived in Brighton since. I've always lived right close to the sea, I live in Hove at the moment, about fifty meters from the seafront. And I just like it, I love it actually. Part of that I suspect is because I grew up in the mountains of Wales, in the valleys and I remember my grandmother saying to me, I think I wrote this in the profile, that you can climb every mountain, you can get to the top of it, and see the view, but you'll never get to that horizon, and my granny said you make that horizon your goal, and you reach for it. You'll never get there, but you'll always be moving forward, otherwise you just end up looking at the view, and, and every time I go out in Brighton, especially when I skate, and I look out at the horizon, I think actually that's, that's my pull, that's my goal in a way. I'll never get where I'm going but actually it's the journey and that kind of boiled down to the plinth in a way, that it wasn't about anything, it was about a journey if you will, it was about the time, the hour, I was up on the plinth, naked, as full as I possibly could of fun for me.

So just to unravel a few things you said, what did you study at university?

I did nursing.

Did you work as a nurse when you moved to Brighton?

I did yes, I worked for a couple of years before I came to Brighton and then I ran out of patience if you will. It was during the [... it was during the AIDs epidemic, pandemic, so I lost a lot of friends and I don't know, I ... in Guildford I'd worked in oncology, which was cancer and that kind of stuff, and palliative care, I'm smoking away talking about it now [laughs] and when I came to Brighton, I didn't, I didn't want to carry on working on in that kind of world, even though oncology is an amazing place to work. It really, it really sorts you out, it makes you realise what's important in your life. You value friendships and sunshine and things like that because the people around you are often running out of time and it makes you value your time a lot. There's also a certain amount of time when you can work in that field without getting burned out. And I didn't want to become burned out, I didn't want to stop caring so when I came to Brighton, they were opening up a new hostel here, that was for drug and alcohol people, and before they used to be kind of old dust house places, and this was a new type of place where people could carry on using the drugs they were using and be resettled whilst having their drug problems dealt with. And because I'd always, I'd worked for an agency for a while, a nursing agency while I was in Brighton and I liked the odd difficult challenging kind of clients and patients, so I was sent off to the difficult people because of course I could handle them in many ways. I

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don't quite know why, I'm just the type of person that could. So I applied for the job in the hostel because the pharmacology was the same. So in oncology, you kind of up the drugs all the way through to control the pain, and the rest of it, it's the same drugs, when people abuse in heroin use and kind of that kind of stuff, so I had I had a training in the pharmacology of poly-substance abuse as they call it, that I could apply to job, and I could also handle difficult emotional states from my other work. So I got the job and I can't remember what the question was now, why I ended up?

Just finding out about your studies and what you did after, so you are answering the question it's fine.

Yes, and that kind of took me out of palliative care and hospital care into dealing with complex situations where people had been victimized, and I worked in the hospital for seven or eight years I think and I really, really enjoyed it, wonderful people, very strange, interesting, completely mad, chaotic individuals, but of that, you know one every one and again, would change their life and transform themselves, like anything, you know it's the one that makes, makes the rest of them worth it. But again, eventually you get really tired of that kind of work of endless heroin addicts and people who try to use you and lie and twist, and it impacts on you as an individual, it makes you very cynical and I found myself, not caring but being a bit more cynical and hard than perhaps I should have been. And then I moved into the work I'm doing now, which is kind of the same but without the toxic stuff. I had a couple of years in between, where I decided to go for the stand-up comedy completely, so I thought right, so I saved up some money, and I thought I really want to do this, I'll do it for three years, from August one year, three years later to August the next year, excuse me [clears throat], if I'm not earning enough money, after that third year, then I'll go back to having a serious job.

So for three years I worked very, very hard, and I got some really got coverage. I got some television coverage, did some television work and did a lot of shows, and was travelling all over the country, doing comedy and I got through to the Edinburgh Festival and I came second in two national competitions, Channel Four competition and ITV competition and I kind of, my nickname was Silverback Eric because I always came second rather than, rather than first. And I really enjoyed it. And then I went to Edinburgh, to do the Edinburgh Festival, which of course is the great goal of the stand-up comedian and you never make any money in Edinburgh, and I hadn't really thought, that although I might make my name, I won't make any money, and I lost a fortune, well thousands of pounds, which, whenever that was, six, seven years ago, was a lot of money, and I came back to Brighton and I really wanted to carry on, but I kind of had a month thinking, well I'm driving three or four thousand miles a month, the reality of performance is you know you're in Croydon one night and Manchester the next night and then you're in Liverpool and then you're in Cardiff and then you're in Plymouth, and after the applause, you end up going to another horrible hotel, where you're on your own, you get back in the car, and I wasn't seeing my friends, and my relationship was suffering at the time. And I thought right, I'm going to get a serious job, I'm going to find a way of making money out of my writing, which I was very good at with the comedy, so I did that, and then I applied for the current job that I've got.

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How long have you been working for Terrence Higgins?

Well I work primarily for the Partnership Committee Sanctitude, so the Terrence Higgins job, which I've done for eight years, is I do that in the evenings and on weekends, so my full-time nine to five job if you will is my kind of hate crime work and my community cohesion stuff. So they're both very serious, in different ways, but actually also very interesting fun, you know I meet a lot of really interesting people, and I get to influence change which I like. I get to use my talents to make communities stronger and influence individuals and their choices. My talents are obviously talking, sharing experience, kind of peer education if you will and being able to, although I've talked at you endlessly for nearly an hour now, I am an extremely good listener. And I know how to, I know how to tease the truth out of people if you will, in a supportive empathic way. So the THT, I've worked for for about eight years now and I still really like it. , and I've always stayed as an outreach worker, because that's what I'm good at, and I've never been interested in climbing the career structure within the THT.

What I'm good at is being on the ground, talking to people. At that point when they might be considering change in their lives, and I can use my own experience as a gay man, obviously professional experience, to reflect and paraphrase what people say to me to say perhaps it's time for you to consider making a change that's better, whether that's through drug use, or alcohol use or bad sexual behaviour, or people are scared or worried and the job allows me to be with people at those points, where you can often influence change in a positive way. And the THT work is brilliant because I work in some fabulously odd places.

And then my main job, which is a bit more formal really but again I get to generate positive stuff and work with communities. And I work very closely with the LGBT community in Brighton which of course is huge and very diverse, so though people are LGBT, they're also black and women and old and refugees and a whole host of complex multiple identities, so I get to work with some very interesting dynamic groups and people. I get to influence change on the kind of strategic level, with institutions as well as with individuals and I like that reach in many ways, and I'm very lucky that my employers who are aware of my kind of other life as a stand-up and a writer, well I'm very blunt and candid, they respect the fact that I can wear different hats in different ways. I suppose they've learned to trust me, you know. When I've done stuff, like the plinth, which might throw my team into disrepute or could be used against me perhaps, I've been very clear with my managers, and said I am doing this, I will be doing that, it might influence my job, I might be critical on it, however, I want you to know beforehand. And they'll be very supportive of me, in many ways, and actually the headdress that I had on on the plinth is currently in my office and different people take it every week and wear it out and about. It's become a, become like a symbol of our office, which is really sweet. And I took it in for a party and it's stayed there, people trying it on all the time.

That's wonderful. So just wanted to ask you also about your skating, you talked in your profile, that you loved skating and some of the music that you played on the plinth, that's what you play to yourself.

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Nearly all, nearly all the music, on the plinth, is from some of my skating tracks. So I've skated for, woof twenty years I think, eighteen years, and I had a had a brief affair with a Canadian skater, when I went to Canada about twenty years ago, who had had the most amazing thighs and ass, he really did, he was just so sexy. It was because he skated all of his life, and he took me out skating, and although I didn't fall in love with him, I fell in love with skating, it was just lovely. and I wanted, I suppose, I wanted to be on my skates, I wanted to be athletic but also quite camp. I didn't want to be a footballer, or a rugby player or the kind of macho sports that people of my shape normally end up doing. So I wanted to be very what's the right way of putting it, very kind of gichi, which is the way skaters put it. And on my wheels, initially when I bought my skates, I couldn't skate at all, didn't have any lessons, and I used to go down to the marina, where there's a big car park at night and practice because I was so embarrassed about looking so daft and you know I was a grown man, and hardly ever did any roller-skating then, when they were over fifteen. And within six months over the winter, I'd taught myself to skate and then that year, of course, I lost loads of weight, I was a lot fatter then. And it became a way of getting around town, a way of being very relaxed, a way of being beautifully sublime in Brighton whilst also being quite athletic.

So it made me very strong physically, built me thighs and me ass up. Gave me a stamina which was very, very nice, which I enjoyed but also, I think most importantly, what skates gave me was an ability to close off from my life. When I'm on my roller skates, with the music, I don't think, it's my body, I'm very physical, so I'm often on my own, I skate at night quite a lot. Brighton's a brilliant town to skate in because there's miles and miles and miles of seafront that go on forever, and when I skated, it was a very physical thing that I was in touch with my body, I wasn't thinking. My body was skating, I just happened to be gliding along inside it, listen to my music and I started, I didn't use to listen to music, and then one summer, somebody bought me an mp3 player, a great big clunky thing, and I used to take it out skating and I put some opera on it and it was a full moon one night and I remember having this amazing, I think I'd had a *spliff* and was a little bit stoned, and I was skating under the moon, on Brighton seafront, and I was just, I felt unbelievably exquisite and part of it was the atmosphere, it was a warm, balmy summer night. I had *Rusalka* on, the opera I think with a bit of *Handle*, and for me, it's about expressing my gayness in a way. So most of the time, I'm quite macho and a bit butch, and you know I kind of present that kind of masculine image of gayness. On my skates, I can be, very strong and macho, but I can also be as camp as I want to. I can spin on my wheels, I can leap, I can jump, I can be, I can be very soft and gentle, whilst also having a lot of power, and I like the contradiction of that for me. So my skating, and the skating music, has always been about me being in touch with myself physically. I don't really like very much modern music, I'm not a great pop music person. I don't like dance clubs, which of course when you're being gay, it's part of your culture, and I always felt a bit isolated from that, that I couldn't stand going to a nightclub and that bang bang bang music on all night long. It used to horrify me, so for me it was a place where I could listen to beautiful music and swish around on my skates.

And I just feel yes, in skating terms, it's called the glide, and you find your glide and it's the place where you stop thinking and you stop having any friction, because of course there's no friction when you skate, so you become this, this kind of friction,

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this gliding creature, and of all the things I do, I feel most at home when I've skated and I've skated all around the world, I've skated naked as well, in many places and you know kind of had a laugh. I skated naked across the Golden Gate Bridge for a laugh and you know, so my skates have been a place where I can, I can perform, and also, I'm mostly quite modest about the things I do, I'm an exceptionally good skater, and I love my skating. Skating is something that I can do, I do it with my eyes closed. I've taught other people to skate, and for me it's about being completely free, and I think I don't dance particularly, you know, I'm probably the only gay man in the world that can't dance very well and everyone around me dances all the time, and I never really did dance in that kind of way. Oddly enough it makes me feel very self-conscious, but when I skate, I don't feel self-conscious, I feel completely free, so for me, skating is my form of dancing, it's that liberating feeling of being out for an hour or two, being able to swish and swirl and go where I want to and not have to think, and trust in my body to be able to express myself. So skating is a spiritual side of me, yes, I'd say my skates are a spiritual side of me.

Okay, thank you for that, and I wanted to bring you back about your mom, you mentioned that she was kind of an unusual person, for the place and time, you know where you lived and you know when you were born, and that kind of thing, I mean, I don't know about your mom, is she still alive?

Yes, both my parents are still alive.

Okay, I wanted to ask you before I asked you a direct question about it.

Yes.

So tell me about them, what relationship have you got with them?

I have a very good relationship with my parents. When I was up on the plinth, I had a little mum sign that I wanted to, because she said she was going to be watching me on the plinth. My mum, although she is very progressive in many ways, in other ways she's incredibly traditional. She's a working class married woman from the Welsh valleys, never very educated, although she has educated herself in the last couple of years, and is now a kind of writer and a published author, and I'm very proud of her. She's also, she's quite disabled, has great difficulty moving around, but never complains. And the key to my mother I think is that she lives in the moment and no matter how difficult her own life may be, she makes the best of what she can, and I've inherited that relentless optimism from her, that no matter how bad it is, you can push forward, so although I may make her sound like some kind of radical feminist hippy type, she isn't that, although she is all of those things, she has enormous respect for all types of people, I've never heard them be racist or homophobic or sexist in the kind of ways you might expect from the kind of white working class values background, and my, and the values aren't really particularly like that. I was always brought up to be whatever I wanted to be in the most supportive ways, even when that might have been difficult for them and you know that certainly was when I was growing up. It wasn't always easy. But I think my mum gave me the opportunity to, not be limited by her own expectations. That's possibly the best way of doing it.

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So whatever I've done she's always been incredibly supportive of me, both, both my parents have been. Although they might not have always understood why I did things, what I like is that she finds, we have the same sense of humour, obviously, she's my mother, I've inherited her sense of humour. So she found, she understood exactly what I was doing on the plinth for instance, because she got it instantly, she realised that it was about playing with myself and playing with my ideas of man and playing with people's perceptions and playing with serious art and actually just enjoying yourself. So I think I think she particularly enjoyed it. She was sitting in Risca, which is the village that we're from with about five of her friends in the local education club who were watching. And her friends are all old Welsh ladies, and I did think when I took my clothes off and my [inaudible] not so much of my mother, because my mother's seen me naked before, I'm her child for goodness sake, but that her friends, who would be seeing her grown son exposing himself in London, on a plinth, and I could hear them, and my mother said, most of them, thank goodness, laughed, because they got the joke, but some of them were kind of like my god, he's naked in London, because to them London is this very odd enormous place up in, up in England where people are you know very formal and busy and you don't do that kind of thing in England.

Yes I'm very lucky with my parents in many ways. They've always understood that I've not quite fitted in and they've supported the different ways that I've sought to develop that to a positive thing. Yes. I've got two sisters, older and younger, who've got lots of kids, so I've never had the kind of pressure that some gay sons do of having to have grandchildren, you know my parents have got, ooh my sister's got five, the other one's got six, so between, my parents have got eleven grandchildren, so they've kind of had the grandchildren stuff, so I've never had pressure to be a breeder, reproduce, you know. They like my friends and they're very supportive, and I'm lucky with my folks in many ways. They're simple, simple, honest working-class people and I think, I've inherited a kind of socialist tolerance from them about you don't have to like people, but actually they are there, so whether you like them or not, doesn't make a difference because you've got to live with them and you might as well learn to get on with them. And I've inherited that from them and I'm really, I'm really glad in a way. Also of course, although I sound very English, I am very, very Welsh and I get teased by folks about my accent, but that was part of moving to England, was to ... I remember David telling me that to really survive in England, you had to be better at English than the English were, and the best immigrants learned English better than, I don't know if this is your experience, but to learn English better than the English, is to understand the English and most immigrants, I might consider myself an immigrant still from Wales, so although I look and sound English, I am, you know I'm very, very Welsh inside and that's more community aspect, where I'm from the mountains, the community, the support, the non-judgement, the working-class, it's key actually to who I am in many ways. Although I've become this very modern, post-modern homosexual, metropolitan type person, deep inside I'm still that little Welsh boy who climbs to the top of the mountains and looks out and thinks, you know amazing, I want to be there one day.

Do you go back often?

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Oh yes, quite a lot, I go back quite a few times a year. I went back end of January, my mum's birthday last weekend so I'm going back home the weekend after next. Yes, I'll take them out. My mum can't get about very much, my father's getting quite disabled man, so a couple of years ago I bought them computers, because they were, it was obvious they were becoming physically unable to interact with people and neither of my parents could type or you know particularly write very much, or things like that. But my mother is, excelled with her computer, so I talk with her on Skype like I do with you. She emails me, three or four times a day sometimes. I really wish I hadn't taught her how to email. However, it keeps us in a physical contact, which is very good. My father's not so good on the web, but he likes it, you know watches sport and his gardening programmes. But when I go back to Wales, I try to go back at least one weekend every two months, because they are getting a bit older you know, and they won't be there all the time, and I do feel conscious of the fact that they won't be there one day, and they're my last connective link in a way to where I'm from. I've still got friends in the valleys, but with my parents gone, I'll have lost that link and I'll feel a bit ruined in England so, and the, a couple of my friends' parents have died in the last years, it's made me really conscious of spending time with my parents and being honest and speaking to them and you know kind of talking. So every time I go home, I take my mum out and we go down to the seaside and she loves it. It, they come here, I bring them here once a year, but it's difficult because I live four floors up so put them in a hotel. But she loves the seaside so whenever I go home, we drive down to *Porthcorl*, which is a resort in Wales that she particularly loves. We spend the day, have fish and chips and just talk, you know sit on the seafronts and she walks a couple of hundred yards and then we go back in and yes. I see them, I see them, I see them a fair amount, I talk to them every week as well. I'm a good Welsh boy, I have to really.

So you mentioned about your mother educating herself in the last couple of years and publishing.

Yes amazing.

Yes, can you tell me more about that please?

Well I bought my mum the computer for her birthday because she used to tell us stories when I was a kid, so when we were going to sleep, we had these series of improvised stories that my mother would tell us every night, and I think my ability with words comes from being exposed to that when I was very young, so the ability to improvise and make up stories and make people laugh comes from her great love of words and of story, and of plot structure and character and dialogue. Quite basic when I was a kid, but I think because that was instilled in me, that wonderful sense of humour and how words were more powerful than anything and you could make them change things with words, when I realised that they were becoming, she had a very nasty attack of pneumonia and had fallen and we thought she was going to die, and I went down to Wales and it was touch and go for a couple of couple of weeks, she was in hospital, very seriously ill, when she came out, and I'd stayed down there for the time, thinking that was it. When she came out I thought, you're going to be a lot frailer now than you've been for the last couple of years, you're probably never going to get physically able. And she uses a little tripod to get around now, although she

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never complains, it's obvious that she's in a lot of pain and I thought actually the computer's transformed my social life. If I can get you interested in it, if you can learn to type, and understand it, it'll give you a new lease of life. You can keep in touch with your friends, you can learn stuff, so I got them a computer initially and then set them up with the training schools for kind of older people in Wales and each, each local community has like an adult education centre and she took to it, amazingly, so she learnt computers within a year and of course my father being a bit stubborn and a bit more Welsh masculine, I thought, if my mother gets involved in it, he will eventually because he won't want to get left behind, but he won't go to school, because he's too proud, but he will let my mother teach him, which is kind of what happened in the [laughs] in the end. But she, within two years, had become excelled in the class, which was really good, this was about two years ago, and then a year after that, which is the last year, she won an award from the Welsh government as an advanced learner at a kind of, I don't know how many training programmes, I had no idea it would become extremely proficient on the web, email like I said, she emails me all the time, and photographs, and then she started writing. Writing down initially the stories that she told us when we were kids and she loves the kind of local scenery and the wild life, most of her kids stories were around the wildlife she sees outside. On the river, on the canal, the birds, the ducks, the otters, all the kind of things you see in Wales. And then a couple of them were published by the kind of the local paper, and some of the poems that she's written as well and since then, she's gone on and on and on.

So she's just been really published now with one of the local canal trusts. Published a book of poetry so she's been in a couple of anthologies the last couple of years, and I've always encouraged her, and I think for her, for me it makes me very, very proud, to see my mother, certainly when the awards were given out, we went down to Wales, to the Millennium stadium which is, and to a Welsh person the Millennium stadium which is Cardiff Arms Park, it's like the rugby ground, is like Buckingham Palace to a Welsh person. So we went down and one of the ministers kind of gave people, all the various people that had won awards, certificates. And my mom won a certificate for adult learning, and the older women's adult learner of Wales, and then we had a tour of the Millennium stadium and kind of taken to the middle of the grounds and my parents were incredibly honoured by that. I thought it was a bit of a political gain really, which is what the new Welsh government were doing, but that's my cynical side, to be honest, I was also really proud to see my mother receive an award for education, because she left school when she was fifteen. She had three kids by the time she was nineteen, she like a lot of women in her generation sacrificed her education and her life for the sake of her kids and to see my mum in her sixties become a bit of a local celebrity and somebody who is known for writing and to see her, the joy in her hand when she's got a book that she's been published in, I don't think she ever thought she could do, and a lot of the time she did through my kind of writing, would encouraged me to do stuff.

It was a wonderfully proud moment, so yes she just, took some more of her short stories published by the ... I'm not sure, Bracken Trust I think and she's shelling them out, like one every week and get a poem, she writes the poems, my friends they're all getting fourteen, fifteen. Yes. It was a really good thing for her to do I think. And my father, who is a bit, as I said had been more stubborn, had got his own

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computer now, in fact, one of their spare bedrooms, they've converted into a computer room and it's like Drodhall bank. And every time I go home, they've got these you know incredibly sophisticated things they want me to do and last time they wanted me to put webcams in and my mum obviously can't go upstairs and they've got the stair lift. So I put webcams in for my mom and my father so he can talk to my mom downstairs, and she can talk to him, you know. And they weren't interested in talking to anybody else apart from me, so they wanted webcam so they can chat about do you want a cup of tea, did you hear what Mister Jones said while they're in separate parts of the house. Very sweet, but it has, it has given them an enormous sense of connection with the world that I think they were losing and I'm really glad for them that that's true.

What's your mother's name?

My mum's always Pam, Pamela Page. My father's name is Allen, yes.

Thank you, that's fantastic.

They've got a whole wall of certificates as well, every time I go home, now my mother's got twenty-nine and my father's got like eleven and the whole wall is full of them. And they're all for things like Word and digital photography and internet stuff. Things that you and I take for granted, but of course to them, at their age and certainly with the limited opportunities they had, it's a quite impressive advance really I think. Very proud of what they've done and the new freedoms it's given them. They're talking to friends they haven't talked to in years, they can, they can chat online, they can, you know my mum can send off stuff that she would have to physically type of stuff you couldn't do before, you know she can email it off and it can be looked at and sent back.

How old are there?

Pardon me?

How old are your parents?

My mum's sixty-six, on Friday. My father's sixty-seven. I'll just have to very quickly go to the loo if you excuse me for a moment.

Yes, I'll wait for you.

I'll be two minutes.

Okay.

Sorry about that.

Don't worry Eric, we're coming to an end now really so I just wanted to check how it's been, the interview for you today?

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Very nice actually. Quite pleasant. I sometimes wonder whether I drone on too much, but to be honest it's nice to reflect on the day, it's what nine, ten months later I think and I haven't done much reflecting and I looked at my video at Christmas, it's the first time I'd seen it in about six months, it was after the night of the opera that I talked about when I remembered being up there and I was a bit worried that it was going to get taken down and I wouldn't be able to see it anymore and that would be the end of it, in many ways. So I watched it through so I haven't done much reflecting so it's quite nice, to sit and reflect about why I did it and to see whether my whether my reasons have changed really and to look back on it and think actually now nine months down the line, now all the fuss is gone, did I do it for the right reasons, was it fun, was I kidding myself and I don't think it changed. I think the stuff that I wrote in the profile, this time last year, is probably exactly what I'd write if I was asked to write about how I'd reflect back on the experience. So this interview's been really pleasant, thank you, you've been very patient.

Thank you, it's really nice talking to you today Eric.

Good, thank you.

END OF RECORDING