

## One & Other Project

*My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here today using Skype calling Claire Kelly on her phone line in Ireland on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010 to re-interview you about your experience on the plinth, Claire.*

Okay.

*So thank you very much for agreeing to be re-interviewed today.*

No problem.

*So Claire first of all, just to remind you, I know you went on the plinth to basically talk about your love of Anglo-Saxon culture, particularly poetry and you had some riddles with you right?*

Yes that's right.

*So just to remind me what exactly is it that you did with your time on the plinth exactly?*

Okay, I divided my time into two different sections. It was really just like a lesson because that's what I do when I'm teaching. So I brought some materials with me from the Anglo-Saxon period in terms of language. First of all I read some Anglo-Saxon literature; it was Biblical literature from Genesis. And then to be interactive with the audience I read some Anglo-Saxon riddles in English and some of them in Anglo-Saxon and the audience was to try and figure out what the riddles were about. The other reason for that was because the same guys, the same monks that wrote Genesis, for example, and Biblical literature, wrote these very bawdy, quite rude and quite sexual riddles which I thought was quite indicative of the Anglo-Saxon period; there were sort of two sides to it.

*Yes, you talked about it in the pre-plinth interview. Now what was it really like to be up there?*

It was a lot higher than it looked from ground level. It was actually petrifying, it was very high and I thought the net was a bit thin. It didn't look like it would hold a human being but it obviously it did and I actually felt, considering that I spend my whole life talking to strangers and standing up in front of strangers and talking to them, I actually felt quite vulnerable which was a very interesting experience. But a beautiful view of London, absolutely gorgeous, and I had a great time.

*Did you get to interact with any of the audience in the square?*

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Not really it was geared more towards the Internet simply because I'm from Northern Ireland, my students and past students and the people that I worked with couldn't be there so what I did was I miked up for the website and a lot of friends family and students watched it live online and then they posted their comments afterwards or phoned me or sent emails. As far as the ones on the ground, I did feel quite bad because often they couldn't hear me but I reckon even if I had a mike they wouldn't have heard me anyway because there was a festival going on in the background but hey, you know, that's life that's just real life.

*I noticed that the square was full of people looking over to the concert stage, how did that make you feel seeing all those people in the square?*

Petrified is the word although I calmed down eventually. One thing I did do was I was very conscious of my body language, which you are when you're a teacher. However I found that whenever I sat down I felt less exposed and a lot more comfortable. But as far as the festival went I had the best view of the day so I wasn't unhappy about it.

*So just to explore a bit further what happened when you first came down the plinth. Did you have any interaction with the audience or members of staff and if so what kind of questions were you asked?*

Yes whenever I turned up at the porta cabin, which was their headquarters, they were lovely they were really, really nice people and they explained what way things worked in terms of how I would, you know, get on to the plinth and how long I would be there. They showed me the video cameras then and what way it worked and just a brief interview really about where I came from and the purpose of my visit. But it was all very relaxed and they were a lovely team and it was very well organized and very well explained. The other thing is I was quite surprised at their interest because it must be tough to keep that interest going whenever you're meeting new people every hour. So no, it was lovely it was really, really lovely and I got a T-shirt which I still wear in bed.

*That's fantastic.*

*So if you were to look back at the experience as a whole what impact has it had on you?*

Well I think I made my point sometimes, I've referred to it quite a lot in the classroom and I refer to it with my team because I run a department where I work and really I suppose the point was that,, as a teacher, I'm concerned

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about not so much the dumbing down of education but just teaching kids what they need to know to get by to get an exam and really what I sometimes want ... I did with my students with the year was ... I used it to demonstrate that you don't always need just to know, that learning is about loving knowledge and loving learning and that that enhances our lives and they were all quite impressed that I got up there in front of so many people and in such a public domain and that I could actually speak a language that they weren't familiar with and if that encourages even one person in my class to expand their knowledge not in a way that's necessarily going to help them pass an exam well I think that's a good thing.

*What department do you run in the school where you teach?*

English.

*Okay. So you mentioned quite a bit about where you live and your teaching career and so on and I just wanted to go back to that and explore a bit further about your life story. So what is it that made you want to become a teacher in the first place?*

Well my family is full of teachers and I suppose one of the primary interests was that teachers have had a very good ... teachers that have taught me have had a very positive impact on my life. I had quite a traumatic home life when I was a child and school to me was a great stability. I enjoyed it and I enjoyed the interaction with teachers and I found teachers who were very good and very interested in their subject enthused me then to go on and learn. Whenever I was at university one of the best teachers I ever had who actually taught me Anglo-Saxon, he was learning Ancient Greek or Ancient Hebrew at the time and I asked him "What on earth are you learning that for?" and he said, "Because it's there" and it was just the best advice I've ever had in my life just to learn something because it's there because there are so many things that aren't there any more and that are lost to us, so why not take advantage of everything that is there? All the opportunities that are there so that's really ... teaching's in my blood, it's in my DNA and it's a big, big part of my life.

*You mentioned having some traumatic times when you were growing up would you mind talking about that?*

Well no, the most traumatic time for me was when I was growing up; it was when our mother died. There were six children and our mother died when we were young and we were raised by our father and that was ... she was such a

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key feature in our home because she gave her career up for us and stayed at home and looked after us and my father had his own business and was a very busy man and we, kind of looking back on it, felt that we'd lost both our parents. So you know we coped in different ways and I can't always say that it was the best but we've all turned out okay but we did fall very heavily in the education and perhaps as a means of escape to, you know, to try and work our way through the trauma that we'd experienced when we were young. All of us love education and all of us are very, very interested in learning so, you know, to be fair I suppose to my parents, you know, my mother and father were both very creative people they encouraged us to learn and act and sing and dance and everything. And so every form of learning, every form of self-expression was explored and we ... I just found that that died when she died because the house went very silent but we participated then through school and then through learning the less we did at home. But it's funny because since I've been on the plinth my father died and it's just another thing I would have liked him to have known he died of dementia and it's just another thing I would've liked him to be conscious of that I had done it because he always thought I was a bit bonkers anyway and I suppose that just sums it up.

*Oh I'm sorry to hear that*

Oh it's OK.

*So how old were you when your mother died?*

I was twelve when my mother died.

*I see you mentioned in the previous interview that there were six of you, six siblings?*

Yes

*And that quite a lot of you went travelling but you were the only one that did not go travelling.*

That's right I didn't. Everybody else went away and travelled various places like my brother lived in Israel for quite a while and he lived in a Kibbutz and [?] most of my family have been everywhere. I haven't but my father wasn't a traveller either he was what would've been known as an armchair traveller and I'm very interested in other cultures and literature, of course, that comes from other countries. But no I haven't really, I must say I found that London is my spiritual home. I just love the diversity of it and I think if you go to London

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you don't really have to go anywhere else because everybody else from everywhere else in the world is there.

*You mentioned that you didn't go travelling like the rest of your siblings is that the particular reason why?*

Sorry could you repeat that?

*Could you hear me? Okay I was just wondering the reasons why you may not have gone travelling whether there was something else keeping you here?*

I have no idea just I didn't have any particular interest in seeing anywhere. I would prefer to read that to actually experience, perhaps I'm just cowardly.

*Okay not to worry I was just curious. So what are your brothers and sisters are up to at the moment then?*

My brother is a journalist and I have four sisters. Erin, my eldest sister, is a Civil Servant, below her then is another sister; she's a Wound Care Specialist. My other sister is an Inspector for Schools and my youngest sister is a Nurse.

*Okay and what were the reactions of your friends and family about you going on the Plinth?*

They thought it was hilarious, absolutely hilarious, my brother's fiftieth we found the links on the Internet and all my friends or all his friends and our family were there and he played it in front of everyone. I was mortified but they were really delighted, they did say they thought I was bonkers but whenever they actually saw it they were they were sat there with pride which I was delighted with they were very, very pleased but unsurprised really as I say there was always presumed to be a little bit of a mad streak in me.

*I noticed on your profile on the One & Other website you had a couple of comments and it seems to me that one person that wrote to you, you didn't actually know each other. Do you know the comment I mean?*

Is this the one it was an artist I think who had written ...

*You have someone called Debbie who, I think, knows you and then someone else called Claire Hutchinson who says she understood your riddles.*

Yes, that's right, yes.

*Did you make contact with her outside the project?*

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I didn't no. I didn't although I wanted ... I should've really to say that I was really impressed because I didn't get some of the riddles.

*I'm just interested to know whether you made any connections with people that either participated by going on the Plinth or were following the project via online communities.*

I didn't, I really didn't. What I did was I followed the project after I had been on it previous to that, I had ... well I'd followed it because I'd applied too early for it and I was so desperate to get on and I hadn't heard anything and then the first planter went on and I just presumed I wasn't going to get a chance. After then I found out that I was going on. I was over the moon and I followed it quite religiously and then after I'd been on I was totally hooked and I watched quite a lot of them. I didn't actually interact with anybody. I also watched the programmes on the planters on Sky Arts ... were great and the ones on Antony Gormley were great as well because to be fair I haven't really heard a great deal about him so, you know, it was very informative but mine looks very tame compared to some of the other crazy folk that were up there. But no, I didn't contact anybody.

*Okay, you know that when you got a place you would have been sent a booklet encouraging you to contact your local community groups and media to let them know you were going on the plinth. Did you do any of these things?*

Do you know I didn't and I considered it because my brother's a journalist, you know, he works for the media. I thought about even letting work know because they ... our website would very much encourage ... that my boss would encourage, you know, activities outside the college. But I sat down and I thought about it and I thought you know what? This is for me, it's just for me, it isn't about promoting really anything in particular except something that I love something, that I'm passionate about and I just kept it for me and I know that's really ironic because it's such a public place and such a public venue but it felt it was just for me. Do you understand?

*Yes of course.*

That's really what it was about. And for, I suppose, in a way it was for my dad as well but I just never said. I never ... oh, I don't know I just never said but it was ... I suppose the juxtaposition of public and private space.

*I was impressed by your style of performance in the sense that you looked like a presenter on the plinth when you were talking about the Anglo-Saxon*

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*culture. I quite liked it.*

But that's my job, that's what I do whenever I'm teaching. You know that's really funny because whenever you're teaching you are just ... in a way you put a face on and you become that person and one thing that I actually really hate is meeting any of my students outside the college like, say, in the supermarket because I'm not the same person. It's quite unnerving. I often liken it to seeing an animal outside of its cage in the zoo so that's just the public face.

*Yes. So what impact has it had on you personally do you think?*

I think first and foremost I'm just aghast that I actually did it. Not knowing what it was going to be like until I got there was probably better for me because when I got there I actually nearly keeled over but it's had a big impact on me just to even say that I've done it. It can be viewed and that's something that I really love. I got to bring into the public forum and you know it's pride I suppose something that was by me sort of for me there's a sense of pride there.

*You mentioned also that you followed it religiously once you knew you were going on the plinth. So just to explore that, how many hours would you watch it a day for example and what sort of timing?*

Oh it wouldn't have been ... I would've just dipped in and out of it, it wouldn't have been for four or five hours or anything it might have been just to watch a bit of one person and a bit of somebody else. So maybe an hour.

*Did you make any other comments at all because you could have done so as well via the website?*

Sorry?

*Did you do any inter-activity with the other potential plinthers?*

No when I was going on the plinth I met the girl who was on ahead of me and the girl who was on after me and we chatted and we talked about, you know, what we were going to do and they brought props and things and where they came from and why they were doing it and, you know, apart from that apart from those two plinthers there wasn't anybody else.

*Okay, thank you for that. Now just to explore further you mentioned that London is your spiritual home.*

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Yes.

*Why do you say that?*

I just love it. I love London I love London I love the vibrancy of it, I love the twenty four hour nature of it and there are so many quiet spaces in London as well like everybody thinks London, "Oh it's, you know, it's mad and it's all go." There's so much beautiful architecture and history which is as much part of the literature which I read because I'm an English Literature teacher, you know. There's lots of plots that are set in London and it's so lovely to see those places preserved. But I just absolutely love it, I don't think in any way that it is morally or spiritually defunct. I also love the cosmopolitan nature of it because there are just so many different people from so many different parts of the world there and it's fascinating, it's absolutely fascinating. So I love the history of London and I love the modernity of it as well.

*Have you ever lived in London?*

No I couldn't afford it.

*But I understand you travel here...you know I live in London you travel here a few times a year?*

Yes, we try to get over two or three times.

*And what do you like most when you come to this place? Where do you go?*

Well the first thing that I love about London is anonymity. I just love it because I come from a small town where everybody knows everybody else and because I teach in ... it's a bigger town but because of the nature of my job you're quite a public figure. What I love about London is just being anonymous; I get a great sense of freedom and of being myself. I love the West End, I love staying in the West End, I love the atmosphere of it. I love the shows, you know, round about what do you call it? Chancery Lane and places like that where's there's a lot of history as well, you know, as Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus. I just think it's brilliant but one thing I do love is just going up and down the Thames on a boat - it's just lovely.

*It is nice isn't it?*

It is.

Where do you live in London?



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*I live in Brixton*

Right.

*In the South East of London.*

Lovely,

*So basically just to explore a bit further about your love for Anglo-Saxon language and culture, I notice that you could speak it when you were on the plinth. What was it like to learn it?*

Sorry?

*What was it like to learn the language?*

What was it like? It was quite tough; it was ... part of the reason why it is such a difficult language to learn is that it is so different from what we know our language to be today. It was, I suppose, an original form of our language but after 1066 and, you know, The Battle of Hastings and the French came over and romanced our language, which is the language that we have today, it's much more Germanic and guttural than the language that we have today. So it was quite, in a way, it was quite alien but a very, very, very beautiful language and I've just seen that Stephen Fry is going to be doing some programmes on early language on TV which will be interesting to see but he has a great love of Anglo-Saxon as well. But I just, as far as learning the language was concerned, it was difficult and not only that but because also there isn't a great deal of it about it would make it quite difficult too so you're really relying a lot on editors, you're relying a lot on filling in the gaps yourself but one of my favourite Anglo-Saxon words is *banhus* which is the word for body and they took everything very literally and what it actually is, because *banhus* is 'bone house' and they just looked at the body as a house for bones and that's what they did they chose their language literally and that's one of the things that fascinates me about it.

*Yes, thank you. You mentioned it briefly actually in the pre-plinth interview. I'm quite interested in understanding what made you choose to study Anglo-Saxon language and culture at Masters level.*

Well I suppose half and half. Half was my interest from undergraduate because I'd studied some of it at undergraduate level the other half was my tutor who was such a brilliant, brilliant teacher. This was the guy who was learning Ancient Greek and Hebrew because it was there and he was just

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such a brilliant tutor. Quite frankly if he had been teaching Nuclear Physics I would've done that, he was just so good. The other thing is as that I am one for the underdog and I thought that it was the less popular choice, in fact I was the only one in Northern Ireland doing it at the time and I wanted to support it. The other thing is that a lot of the great, great writers that I've read like Tolkien for example had ... and Colin Dexter as well who wrote the Morse novels and there's loads of them, there's loads of absolutely brilliant writers who had studied Anglo-Saxon so I thought there might be something in it.

*I see but when did you first begin to take an interest in Anglo-Saxon culture?*

As an undergraduate I was introduced to it. I didn't know any really, I didn't know anything about it and we studied Beowulf in translation and I loved the story I loved the idea of the extraordinary and the ordinary being fused and I also loved Icelandic literature as well and I found similarities between the two of them and I was just fascinated by it. The other thing that fascinated me as an undergraduate I'd studied Religious History and I was very, very interested in how the Anglo-Saxons fused Christianity, newly-found Christianity or newly-introduced Christianity, to their own Pagan culture through language so that was really as an undergraduate I'd started to explore that.

*I see. So when you were going to go on the plinth did you think about different things you were going to do or were you always set on this idea of talking about Anglo-Saxon culture?*

Yes, it was just instinctive, you know, if they had just been walking through London they would have stuck me on the plinth and I didn't know ... I would've talked about it anyway probably, it was just an instinctive choice, there wasn't a great deal of thought that had gone into it because I've spent so many years teaching, bringing it into the classroom and using it as an informed method of improving my students' learning experience so it's just instinctive.

*Okay. Can you hear me okay at the moment?*

Sorry?

*Can you hear me?*

Yes I can.

*Sorry. I'm aware you can't hear me very well.*

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I know I'm sorry.

*Is that to do with the volume of the call or my pronunciation?*

No gosh, no, not your pronunciation, it's this crap phone.

*It's the line, okay, that's good to know because I'm wondering whether I need to change the setting. That's fine, thank you.*

*So just to explore further what life is like where you live, you know, at the beginning of your pre-plinth interview you talked quite a bit about Hollywood the town where you come from and I had a look on the web to see where it was and you're very close to the sea, right?*

Yes.

*So just tell me what it is you love about this place.*

It's a little bit like every small village in England. It has a lot of history, it has a lot of open spaces as well as private spaces, it's quite a knowledgeable little place as well where people are interested in local history and just local events. It has always maintained a separation from the rest of Northern Ireland and the Troubles for example never hit here we were very, very fortunate and we didn't experience any of that during the really bad times. So there's a sense of ... it's not a looseness but it is a separateness where there's an also a lot of eccentric people that live here and they're very well accepted because it's just that kind of place.

*What is the most significant place in the town for you if you were to think about it?*

Probably along the shoreline because it's such a vast open space and it's so free and there's a great sense of openness and freshness I suppose about it. There's also a lot of memories there from when I was younger and we used to walk along there and I also, you know, brought my children there too and no, there's definitely a sense of freshness and freedom there in that big open space.

*So what are your children doing at the moment?*

I have three children. My oldest child will be twenty one in a couple of weeks and the twins, boy and girl twins, are nineteen. My eldest son, Roy, who's twenty one, works for his father and the twins are both ... one twin is at

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university studying Law the other twin is waiting for A-level results. She wants to be a Psychologist.

*And how are you happy about the choices they are making?*

I'm ... do you know what? I'm happy that they're happy and that's the only thing that matters, nothing else is really, you know, nothing else is really relevant.

*And what does your husband do?*

My husband runs his own business, he fits tyres and buys and sells tyres for heavy machinery.

*You mentioned that you two had known each other since you were sweethearts.*

Yes I'd like to think we still are ... gosh, we have for a long time twenty odd years, worrying.

*And how long had you known, sorry I know you just told me that, sorry where did you meet each other?*

In Hollywood he had friends here and we just met here it was just very natural.

*And what did he think about you going on the plinth?*

Unsurprised at the insanity of it but brilliant, you know, absolutely brilliant. If you've seen it it's funny because I'm talking to him and the camera is scanning the crowd to see who I'm talking too but that's him. He's very calm and he, you know, very supportive and he come over to London and he, you know, he stood there the whole time listening to me ranting on and he's great, he's great, he thought it was great, he thought it was good crack in it's own demonstrative way I suppose.

*Oh that's fantastic. Have you been back to London since you've been on the plinth?*

I haven't been. My father died at Christmas and I'm still trying to come to terms with that so I haven't been. I'd absolutely love to have gone over this summer but we've got business to sort out with his finances and things so I haven't been but hopefully I'll be over before the end of the year.

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*Well you must let me know what it's like to see the plinth again, what sort of feelings happen once you're in Trafalgar Square.*

My sister was over in London a few months ago and she said they ... she brought her two sons to Trafalgar Square and they were looking up at the Plinth and they were aghast that I had been standing there.

*So I guess you're still talking about the experience with your friends and family?*

Yes I think they're all quite bored of it now.

*Just to give me a clue about how you remember the event.*

I remember it as just being brilliant very, very positive, very exciting, frightening, exhilarating, brilliant, absolutely brilliant, I loved it, I really, really loved it.

*Oh, thank you very much. Well it's really lovely to speak to you today Claire and I shall be sending you the consent form like I said.*

Okay.

*And hopefully we'll keep in touch.*

Brilliant, thank you so much indeed.

*Oh, thank you.*

Okay.