

## One & Other Project

*My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm conducting an interview on behalf of the Wellcome Trust for the One & Other collection on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010 with Tom Magill using Skype. We're using video but we're producing an audio file but thank you very much for agreeing to participate Tom.*

No problem.

*As I mentioned, we are conducting some follow up interviews with people that stood on the plinth because, of course, it will be interesting to see what it was like in retrospect since your pre-plinth interview was done before you went up and also because I'll be using some of the content of your interviews to produce a website that will tell the rest of the world that we have this oral history collection.*

Okay.

*So just first of all just to remind you, I mean I know you know what you did on the plinth but you talked about the charity that you run, you're one of the people that runs ... who helps prisoners and ex-prisoners do drama, theatre and film, right?*

Yes, that's right.

*So you went up there and you had an audio recording that talked about what you do.*

Yes.

*So what was it like to be on the plinth, do you remember?*

In a way it was incredibly humbling to have a space in such a central part of London, in such a public arena for an hour, completely on my own, and it was an amazingly humbling experience in many ways, that I was able to share that to share my work with people in that way. So I felt very honoured and privileged to be able to be there and to be able to share what I do with other people in that wide arena, in central London. I was also very excited as well, and I really enjoyed the live interaction with the audience, even though I didn't say any words. There was still a lot of communication between myself and the audience and I really enjoyed that as a performer and it was a great experience, it was a wonderful idea of Antony Gormley and, you know, I'm just really, really pleased to be able to have been part of it and I have many good memories of it, of that hour and I'm so glad that I did it.

*Do you remember what happened? And when you were on the plinth you mentioned the interactivity with people in the square, I assume.*

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Yes.

*Did you get talking to anyone, or did anyone ask you questions?*

Well, afterwards we had, you know, we went for a meal and I spoke to people on the way on the way there and met people on the street and met people in the restaurant so it was very, very interesting in a way. I had a great debate and dialogue and there was people who were with me who were down with the audience, the spectators, and I think many people were intrigued by what I was doing and some people stayed and other people were just passing through and so we had people down mixing with the audience, talking to them because the audience were quite puzzled, and they were saying, 'What's happening? What does this signify? Why is he changing those t-shirts? What's he spelling out?' and the t-shirts spelled out the word 'creating radical transformation' and so people were saying, 'What's that about? How come you're creating radical transformation? How? And who with? And Why?' And so we explained to them this is what we're doing, we're using drama and theatre to empower prisoners and ex-prisoners to find their voices and tell their stories and to create a transformation in their own lives using creativity, using drama, using theatre, using film as a way to encourage those people to find their voices and tell their stories because these are voices we don't often hear and I thought it was a great way to liberate the captive voices of the prison by bringing it to central London you know to the square and sharing it and letting those voices speak for themselves, that's what the audio was about, the audio was a series of theatre pieces and film pieces that I've done with prisoners over the last 20 years and so they were just examples of creativity, so they were authentic prisoners' voices being freed in the centre of London and I think that was exciting for me, to let those voices speak for themselves, and I was simply there to represent them and to witness what impact that was having upon an audience and that was important for me. So it became, well, a very humbling experience as I said and it was really quite ritualised and it was really quite dignified because there's a lot of sensationalism around prisons and prisoners and I didn't want that, I wanted it to be dignified and reasonable and showing prisoners in another light, not as destructive human beings but actually as creative human beings, as human beings who are capable of creativity, as human beings who are capable of changing and there but for the grace of god go I because all of us could have ended up in prison and that's they were some of the things that I wanted to try to get across with the hour's performance.

*Thank you. I will ask you quite a few things actually about the work that you do, but I think maybe we should stick to the time on the plinth and then just after then move on to the next part of the interview. So when you came off the plinth, how were you feeling?*

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Elated, I felt elated and I felt very happy, I felt very proud and I felt that it had been a success, that we'd managed to hold the attention of many, many, many people for a whole hour's performance with no words except for the words of the prisoners that was recorded on an audio tape and so I was proud and I was very humbled and I was very excited.

*Did you get any media attention?*

We had media attention when we came back to Belfast, there was interest from the Belfast Telegraph who then consequently ran a story about they ran a feature article on me, and why I was doing what I was doing, they wanted to know, so in that, I've got a copy of it that I can send you, if you want, so I can do that. It was basically about ... I think the headline was 'Ex-Prisoner Goes Back to Jail to Direct Shakespeare' and so they did a whole feature about my own life, my own experience, and how I had went to prison when I when I was a in my youth and had found an education and arts in prison and then was able to transform my own life using arts education and basically what I wanted then to do was to go back into the prisons and to share that with other people because the arts and creativity and drama and theatre and literature and film had an amazing impact upon me and helped me transform my own life, so I thought well, if it's worked for me, it can work for other people as well, and that's why I wanted to go back into the prison, to share with young people in a similar situation to where I was at that point in my life and to show them a way of changing because many people are in prison want to change but they don't know how, and the current methods that the prison administration offer them are very traditional, and really don't have much creativity in them and so the prisoners don't go, they don't get involved, they don't participate and so I wanted to offer them another way to help them change if they wanted to and so that's been I suppose a crucial part of my life's work, doing that and the hour on the plinth was like a pinnacle for me, in terms sharing that work with people in the centre of London.

*Thank you for sharing that with me Tom. There's quite a few things I wanted to ask you. Of course you talked about some of your life story and the work that you've done as an actor in your pre-plinth interview which I'm very happy to send you a copy of the transcript but just for the purpose of now to remind you. I found it fascinating that you'd been involved with a Shakespeare company in London and had taken and set up a branch in Belfast. What I wanted to know I suppose is when did the work with prisons come into it?*

Okay.

*And you know how did it all start off and perhaps some of the difficulties I'm sure you must have faced to convince, you know, the prison service to let you in.*

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Yes, yes. I worked with the English Shakespeare Company with Michael Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company in 1993. I met him when I was teaching in Dublin in Trinity College in Dublin. I was doing a year teaching drama and I met Michael Bogdanov and basically after meeting me and working with me he said, 'Why don't you come to London and join our company?' So I went to London and I loved it and I learned so much about Shakespeare from him. The most important thing I learned from Michael Bogdanov was that Shakespeare is too important to leave to the academics and what we must do is contemporise Shakespeare, we must make him relevant to people today because he's become, he's become emasculated, he's become ... he's been taken out of the culture, the popular culture that he was in during his day and rarefied within the academy. So that he's become a cultural part of the cultural elite and that's not, Shakespeare's much more popular than that and Shakespeare is relevant today, his stories are as relevant today as they were 400 years ago, so that's what I learned from Michael, that what we must do is contemporise Shakespeare and make him relevant and accessible to people today and working I learned how to do that and working with his company, the English Shakespeare Company, we toured all over London, all over Britain, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and indeed the Republic of Ireland. I remember telling people the furthest north I've ever done a Shakespeare workshop is the Orkney Isles in Lerwick and ... no, that's Shetland it's at Kirkwall in Orkney and the furthest south I've even done one is in Cork, so we've spanned everywhere doing Shakespeare workshops and what I found was that when we told Shakespeare's stories in a way that was accessible for young people they immediately engaged in them, immediately engaged in them in terms of making them relevant to their own cultures and their own conflicts. I remember in Bradford a young Asian girl said to me, 'Isn't Juliet so brave?' And I said, 'Why, why, what makes you think she's brave?' She said, this was a thirteen year old Asian girl, she said, 'Imagine, having the courage to stand up to your father and say that you don't want to marry the man that he wants you to marry.' And for her that was her experience, you know, her family was setting up a marriage she didn't want to go into and I said, 'Is that the story of your own life?' And she said, 'Yes, it is, but I have my ... I love a punk.' 'Oh so your punk is your Romeo?' She said, 'Yes, he's my Romeo.' So she was making sense of that story, that 400-year-old story about the Montagues and Capulets in her own life and her own experiences.

So I trust Shakespeare as a dramatist and as somebody who understands human beings and why human beings do what they do and when I went to work in Maghaberry Prison I was I worked in the Maze Prison before Maghaberry and the Maze Prison was a, is called Long Kesh or it was called Long Kesh it was for political prisoners and I worked there and it was an amazing experience working with the political prisoners and so we did an

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adaptation of Bobby Sand's epic poem *The Crime of Castlereagh* and that's on video on as well, we have that on video, we made a record of it with ten IRA prisoners who were talking about their struggle, their life, from their point of view, and indeed I included some of the *The Crime of Castlereagh*. In the audio recording on the plinth there are three, there are three sections to it, it's based on Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Jail* and it's written in the same metre and it starts, 'I scratched my name, but not for fame, upon the whitened wall, Bobby Sands was here, I wrote with fear and awful shaky scrawl, I wrote it low, where eyes don't go, twas but to testify, that I was sane, and not in vain, should here I come to die.' And so myself and ten IRA prisoners we devised a piece, a theatre piece ninety minutes in length with that poem and we used a lot of physical theatre, because we had nothing, we were in the 'H' Blocks, we had our beds and we had blankets and sheets and nothing else, we had no ... we had very, very little. So we used our bodies, we used image, Augusto Boal's image theatre to make the images in that play and I just worked with Michael Bogdanov on an adaptation of Beowulf so when the IRA prisoners in 'H' Block 4 asked me to help them adapt Bobby Sand's epic poem I was the right person to do the job because I'd just learned so much from working with Michael on adapting Beowulf. So that was my first introduction to prisons, you know, when I came back to Ireland after living in England and I remember telling the IRA prisoners that I'd been in prison as a young man and it was, you know, we developed a very, very honest and open relationship and it was based on trust and respect and that was quite remarkable because my own history is I come from the opposite tradition from them, I'm from a loyalist tradition and they are republicans and so, you know, that's ... they were my enemy but I told them the story of how I came to transform my own life when I was in prison and I was eighteen years old and I was in Bedford Prison and next door to me was an IRA hunger-striker and at that point in my life I was very, very angry and I was very unhappy and full of hatred and I hated myself and I hated my name and I hated the place where I was born, I hated my culture, I hated everything, and I was very, very, very angry.

So this man who was in the cell next to me, I was planning to hurt him, to stab him, to scold him and because of my anger and because he was my enemy, and he was an opportunity to vent it and when I met him, my enemy, when I, because I was planning on what I would do, and then I met him and my anger turned, it melted away, my anger melted to compassion because instead of a man I saw a child in man's clothes because he was on the 44<sup>th</sup> day of his hunger-strike and was a tiny figure and he weighed about five stone, and so my turned to compassion for this other human being and he and I began a dialogue in that prison cell and he encouraged me to educate myself and it was the words of encouragement from my enemy who became my teacher in fact that that helped me transform my life. So my enemy became my teacher and I went to the prison library that night and I took out John Steinbeck's book

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*The Grapes of Wrath* and I remember reading Steinbeck's book and it brought tears to my eyes and it brought me back to my own humanity, so I know from first hand experience that great literature can help people transform their lives, because it happened to me, and great literature like Shakespeare, like John Steinbeck, great literature can teach us about ourselves and teach us about our own humanity and we can learn from it from the pages of those books, if we can read and I could read, and I'm very lucky and a lot of the prisoners I work with can't read so it's an important task that we help to educate people and to give them the opportunities so they can engage with literature that can help them to transform their lives, but that's basically, and I told the men in 'H' Block 4 that story and they respected me because of it and they trusted me because of it, and we became firm friends and we put that play on and it was a huge success, *The Crime of Castlereagh*. Six hundred people came to see it in St. Angus' Hall. The now-president of Sinn Féin opened it and there was thirty-eight of the hunger-striker's families in the front row who came to see it and remember this is somebody from a different community, somebody whose ... they would have or somebody that would have been perceived by many in their community as an enemy and here I was working on something incredibly important to them Bobby Sand's epic poem and helping document it and helping tell their stories through theatre. So that was an amazing experience for me and that was in 1995/6 but McDonnell in *Theatres of the Troubles*, which is an Exeter University Press publication, so if people wanted to read more about that and the next major piece that I did was in Maghaberry Maximum Security Prison and that's *Mickey B* and that's an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* made with prisoners and if people wanted to learn more about that they could go to our website which is <http://www.esc-film.com/> and learn about *Mickey B* and *Mickey B* is a world first, nobody in the world, to our knowledge, has made a feature film in a maximum security prison that's an adaptation of Shakespeare with prisoners as cast and I wrote the story to it, so I'm an ex-prisoner myself ... it's a piece conceived and performed by prisoners or ex-prisoners and it's very, very close to my heart because I thought it would be a really good opportunity because what people don't see, what the public don't see, is they don't see the guilt that feel about what they've done and doing *Mickey B* gave those men an opportunity to express the guilt that they feel about the crimes that they've committed even in a fictional form through classical fiction through *Macbeth* because *Macbeth* is a story about betrayal about ambition about loyalty but one of the theme in the play is guilt and it ultimately leads to the suicide of Lady Macbeth um and so guilt features very, very heavily in *Mickey B*. as a theme and I wanted the public to see ... to have the opportunity to see the guilt that prisoners feel about what they've done, because prisoners are human beings too and many of them have been victims, that's an important point and I wanted the public to see ... I wanted them to see the human side of the prisoners and the guilt that they feel about the crimes that they've committed, so, and I think we achieved that in the film and the documentary where people talk about openly and

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frankly about who they are and what they've done and what's happened to them and it was ... I think there was a real catharsis involved for many of the men in it and they were able sometimes for the first time to talk about the release that they felt at being able to deal with how they really feel about what they've done, even in a fictional form there's still catharsis, it's still worthwhile and so for me it was a worthwhile exercise to do that because very often the traditional programmes in the prison the behaviour offending behaviour programmes etcetera, they can't really tell the truth about how they really feel about what they've done because the peer group pressure is so strong in the prison that if they did they'd lose face amongst their peers and they would become vulnerable and they would and they would lose status, if they said, 'This is how I really feel about what I've done, about the murder I've committed, this is how I really feel.' They would lose face, they might they might be attacked, they might, because other prisoners many of the prisoners would see that as a weakness, they see sensitivity and showing vulnerability and expressing emotion as feminine and as a weakness and so that's why a lot of people, a lot of prisoners, are carrying unexpressed guilt about what they've done and our programme *Mickey B*. enabled prisoners to express some of those unexpressed emotions and guilt about what they've done, in a safe way that's the important point, in a in a fictional safe way, so that they didn't lose face within their peer group, they didn't lose status because of it was an acceptable way to talk about what they've done and the feelings associated with it.

*Thanks for that Tom. There's quite a few questions I want to ask you of course the first thing would be, have you stayed in touch with any of these prisoners, I mean the ones for example that became ex-prisoners that were allowed to leave eventually the prison and if so what happened to them now?*

Yes, yes we have. Many of the prisoners who were in *Mickey B* are ... some of them now are starting to come out, Sam who played Duncan in *Mickey B*, Sam's sentence was twenty years for armed robbery and Sam has been out now for four years he's started volunteering with us and now he has a job, he has a flat and he has a car. Sam is taxpayer and before ... so he's been out for four years, Sam says that's the longest he's been out of prison since his teens, Sam is in his mid-50s now, so Sam is theoretically a success, he's broken the cycle of recidivism through the volunteering and job opportunities, training and job opportunities that ESC has given him. He's now on a path to being a citizen, he's an active citizen, and what really struck me was I met Sam's mother and she said to me, she took my hand, this is a woman in her eighties now, and she said to me, 'Thank you for giving me my son back.' And I was really touched when this woman said this to me and then his daughter on a different occasion said, 'Thank you for giving me my daddy back to me.' And Sam now is a grandfather because his daughter has a child and he'll never go back to prison because he's got a new life because he's been

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helped, he's been given the opportunity to volunteer with us, come and train with us, come and work with us and now he's doing it for himself. The guy who just played Robbie, the guy who played Duffer, Mac Duff in *Mickey B*, Robbie was a life sentence prisoner and now he's beginning to volunteer with us two days a week and it'll move to three days a week in the future. He's so excited about what he's doing and we're hoping to create further opportunities for more people coming out of prison to volunteer with us and hopefully to get them into employment or at least to interview. We're actually doing ... there's one more guy that I should mention and his name is Sam too and Sam served, he was sentenced to eight years for manslaughter, and he served twenty-six years in prison, eighteen years over his tariff so from the prison's point of view Sam broke every rule in the book and he was completely unmanageable. Sam has been volunteering with us and is beginning to bring, has brought money in for projects to work with disenfranchised youth on the streets, and because of his experiences he can do that and the youth like him and they trust him, unfortunately Sam recently within the last month was hospitalised when he was attacked by a sectarian mob who beat him for standing up to them evicting a young Catholic family out of a loyalist area, so Sam stood up to these guys and consequently they put him in hospital and I went to visit him in the hospital and he had sixty stitches in his head, his fingers were broken, he might lose an eye and he has broken ribs. However he's in great spirits and he said, 'Well, I did what I did, all I could do and I stood up to the bullies who were trying to evict this innocent woman and her children from this house that she'd lived in for many years. So that's Sam's story and we're really looking forward to Sam finally getting out of hospital and coming back to work with us and we hope to have more people, you know, coming out of prison who've been involved with *Mickey B* who've been involved with us coming to work with us and there's lots of requests coming in on a daily basis basically, but we're a tiny organisation we have one part-time worker and we're trying to do all of these things with one part-time worker in the organisation the rest of us are volunteers or we are freelance professionals so we have to work wherever we can to earn the money to pay for our families, but in the mean time we're blessed by the quality of the volunteers that we have in the organisation so but it's ironic because the first Sam who played Duncan who's been out of prison for four years now we worked out, we'll it would have cost around £90,000 per year to keep Sam in prison. So he's been out four years now, so that would be, we've saved the British taxpayer about £360,000 so even if they gave us 10% of that we could probably get a salary for another worker in our organisation so we probably need to be working out with the government ... we would love to sit down with government, we would sit down with Ken Clarke and work and set and introduce ourselves and say, 'This is who we are and this is what we do, and these are the stories of the successes of the people who have been through our programmes.' And talk to them yourself I don't need to sell you anything, go and ask people who are sitting there, because everything I've told you



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about is true, about those people who have come out and you can verify any of that, if you come to our office on any day and meet those people face to face that's what I would ask Ken Clarke to come and meet us, Mr Clarke if you're listening to this at all please come and visit us in Belfast in Royal Avenue we welcome it, you want to recidivism and so do we and we have a method that that we can share with you we have a method that works we want to share it, but we need support, we can't continue to do this forever on zero point of a salary it's not sustainable, it's operating on goodwill, it's operating on volunteerism and it needs support, you're you've talked you commitment to reducing you've said which is honest you have said 'Prison doesn't work.' I agree with you, prison doesn't work, it's simply warehousing, prison is simply warehousing, that's what it is, Maghaberry Maximum Security Prison is the most expensive warehouse in Europe for keeping people in and you do nothing with people when they're in prison when they come out they're going to come out even more angry and even more frustrated with no more skills or no chance of starting a different path or direction so let's stop that, let's use the successes that we have, to create more successes and let's employ some of the ex-prisoners who've have come out who are volunteering with us as a way to show other prisoners and other young people who have not yet gone to prison that there is another way, but we need people like Sam, like the two Sams, like Robbie, like myself, people who have been through it, that's what we need in order to do it so that's what I would ask, please come and meet us, please talk to us, please sit down, and please support us.

*Tom, you talked about the 0.5 post funded for your organisation, where are you getting your funding from?*

That's a very ... there's a very funny story behind this, we, an ex-prisoner, myself, and Sam who did twenty years for armed robbery and Kirsten Kearney went to a meeting with a corporate organisation the three of us sat down, Kirsten in the middle and Sam and I either side and we pitched the idea of who we were and what we were doing and they listened, the three people on the panel liked our idea very much about using the arts and using drama and using film to help prisoners change their lives and we were asking that corporate organisation for £100,000 which is to sustain us for six years, you know a zero point five post for six years and they said this is absolutely fascinating, this is amazing, we would love to support this but you know we're a bank! That was Lloyd's TSB, we sat down in front of Lloyd's TSB and pitched that, now you imagine Sam did twenty years for armed robberies, so there we were with an ex-armed robber sitting in front of the bankers saying ...

*You're making me laugh now as well now.*

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Please give us some money to help us transform these lives and these bankers said, 'We're not sure this is a ... you've given us a very difficult dilemma, would you mind stepping outside the room for five minutes?' So the five minutes turned to fifteen minutes and they talked amongst themselves about the dilemma we had presented them with and eventually they brought us back into the room and said, 'We have never ever, ever had such a dilemma to face as the dilemma that you've put in front of us, however, we are so excited and banks don't usually take huge risks, but we want to take a risk on you and we want to do it.' And so Lloyds TSB gave ESC £100,000 and I would like to say to Lloyd's TSB that has kept us afloat, without their support we wouldn't exist we would have ceased trading and they have kept us afloat so there's a corporate organisation, a conservative corporate organisation, i.e. a bank, putting money into this, that's amazing and it's, you know, all credit to Lloyds TSB for doing that and particularly to Sandra Kelso-Robb who supported our bid. I would like to thank Sandra for doing that and I'd like the people in Lloyds TSB who gave us that money and had the courage to give us that money because, well, this is what we've produced, we've continued to do the work and now we're going to be working with the probation service for Northern Ireland on a small project, it's an eleven week project and we're doing a project called 'CVs on Film' so we're going, over eleven weeks, we're going to work with eleven ex-offenders and we're going to give them the skills to put their CV on film and then they can pitch it to employers, so they'll tell the truth about themselves, they say, 'I've been in prison, I've made mistakes.' And they'll be honest and open about that and they'll say, 'but nevertheless this is what I can do, I'm a good timekeeper, I'm reliable, I'm honest, I'm trustworthy, and I'm a good team player, please give me an interview.' And so that's what we're going to do so that because at the moment if employers get a CV from a person and it says well, 'I've been in prison.' Or they have a huge gap in their life that they can't account for, immediately it goes in the bin, so what we've done is we've said, 'No, let's be honest about it.' Because if you think about our age now where we are this is an age of fraud, this is an age of lies, this is an age of deceit and this is an age of denial, politicians, clergy, bankers, corruption and deceit and betrayal, and so what we want to do is, we want to say, 'Wait, here are people who are looking for a second chance.' and what they are doing is, they are being honest, they are saying, 'I have made mistakes, but ... I'm admitting to you my mistakes, and I made big mistakes and here they are, but I'm not just the worst thing that I've ever done in my life, I'm more than that and here are some of the things that I can do, not what I have done, but what I can do.' And we're hoping that that pilot will be a success and that the Probation Service of Northern Ireland will mainstream it and we're already talking to people in a recruitment agency who were very excited about putting CVs on film and they said, 'Wow, that could really work because it short-circuit a lot of the doubt, it would take the doubt out of a lot interviews.' So they were very excited about that, so we're hoping to develop this idea, CVs on film, because at the moment, I believe that one of the keys

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of breaking the recidivism is employment and if people can't be employed lawfully then they will turn to banditry to feel themselves and feed their families, so if we can actually help people into employment [?] then that's taken care of. They won't steal anymore, they won't rob anymore, they won't break the law and they'll become taxpayers, they'll become citizens, they'll become active citizens instead of criminals, and we must give people a second chance to become active citizens and not just label them and warehouse them as criminals because change is possible but we need to work at it and we need support to work at it, but it does work.

*Yes, thanks Tom, I just wanted to know a little bit more about the way your organisation is run, I supposed you mentioned you got funding from Lloyds bank, are you a charity or a social enterprise or a private business?*

We're a charity and we are a company limited by guarantee, so we have charitable status, the Inland Revenue have granted us charitable status because primarily we're about education so we're giving education to marginalised groups, we're helping people who don't have an education, who the education system has failed, we're helping those people get qualifications, get training, and hopefully get employment so that's what we're about, so people can make donations, if they want, because we're a charity and we're also company limited by guarantee so that's who we are, that's our status.

*Thank you for that, so what do you think are the issues the prisoners face today?*

The prisoners face? The issues?

*I mean I'm talking from the perspective of you having been in prison, seeing how people are getting on, you obviously were in prison yourself a while back which we can talk about later, I'm just thinking what can you see when you were there, what people are facing right now.*

What strikes me when I go into a prison, no matter what prison it is, is the complete and utter waste of money that you and me are paying as taxpayers and secondly, what I think is the complete waste of potential of the people in that prison in terms of them um they're are just rotting, they're sitting there rotting, people are rotting in prison, they're just warehoused, they're not doing what they could be doing, they're not being engaged in meaningful activity, in education, in training, generally speaking that doesn't happen, and for me that's a huge, massive waste of human potential and so people vegetate in prison, they atrophy, they basically die, people wither and die in prison, that's what happens, or else they rebel and they fight back and they go on hunger-strike and they punch out prison officers or they take drugs to escape it and drugs is a huge issue in prison and the reason why people take drugs in

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prison is because of boredom because there's nothing to do and if you're illiterate and you're on a basic regime in a prison and you have no TV, no radio, nothing, no way at all, and you can't read books, what, how do you put your day in, you take drugs, to get out of your head, to, or sleep, so people either sleep or take drugs, or watch TV, if they're not on a basic regime and they waste their days watching daytime TV so it's just what I see is the dilemma for prisoners is their mental health issues, their health issues you know and the dilemma for prisoners is, 'How do I stay healthy in a toxic, sterile environment, how do I stay healthy and keep my sanity?' For me it was through education, I was able to transform my life through education and I've seen other prisoners doing it through arts education particularly people can transform their lives, they can, creativity is a great way to do it, creativity puts people back in control because all responsibility is taken away from you in prison, the choices are taken away from you in prison, you your breeds a culture of dependency, complete and utter dependency, dependency on the system to sustain you, or dependency on drugs to get you out of your head, from the banality and mundaneness and the monotony of the prison, so prison creates it creates recidivists, prison creates recidivists there's a huge percentage of recidivism particularly in young people, in America it's something like 80%, people go back to prison, here it's somewhere between 60 and 70% depending on whose statistics you believe, so prison doesn't work, it doesn't work, it's expensive, there are too many people in prison and the people who are imprisoned are not engaged in meaningful activity at all, in the majority of prisons, they are not engaged in meaningful activity so the dilemma, or the challenge from a prisoners point of view is how do you put in your day, how do you put in your day, and how do you stay sane, and how do you stay healthy and how do you manage healthy relationships with your family, they're the issues.

*Thank you Tom, now to bring you back to your time when you said you went to prison you were eighteen, in the pre-plinth interview you told my colleague that your parents moved to England when you were a young man and that you struggled because of racism and you had your accent and you came to live in London, it was just a very brief introduction to your life story.*

Yes.

*So I sort of wondered whether you want to tell me more about what happened, how you got, you know, to end up in prison.*

Yes, my family moved so I was born in loyalist ghetto in north Belfast and my mother saw in 1969 the troubles started and my mother, who was a very wise woman, said, 'Let's get out of here, get the family out of here.' And so moved the family to England and when I went to England it was a huge culture shock to me because I thought I was British and when I went to England they said,

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'No, you're not British, you're Irish.' So it was a huge shock for me, and I rebelled against that, and I fought it and, but basically, so I was bullied in school for being for being Irish even though I said I was British and there was a teacher in school who bullied me, physically and mentally, and got the rest of the children in the class to bully me too, so he was complicit in the bullying and consequently I hated myself and I hated school and I hated education. I hated Ireland, I hated Belfast, I was just a, I became a very, very, very angry young man and I also had a terrible sense of wanting to belong, so I was very vulnerable, so I got involved with gangs and groups and whenever there was an opportunity to prove myself when the gang said or the group said, 'We need a, we need a car to steal.' I say, 'I'll volunteer.' So I would volunteer to do as much as possible in order to get credibility and in order status and in order to belong to this group and so inevitably it led me into trouble, it led me into prison, and I was involved in violence, people said, 'That guy who works here is a tout, he's an informer, he's a police informer, we need somebody to beat him up.' 'I'll do it. I'll do it.' And so that's what I got involved with, I was incredibly vulnerable and incredibly needy in terms of wanting to belong and it was a recipe for disaster, you know, those needs and that peer group, you know, because they just totally exploited me, I was totally exploited but I didn't see it at the time. I just saw it as a group I wanted to belong to and so I got imprisoned for violence for three years and that's when I went to prison, and that's when I met the IRA hunger-striker Frank Stagg in the prison cell next to me, when I was taking his food in and out, his food that he didn't eat of course you know I told you the rest of the story so ...

*Which part of London were you living in?*

Well, I it wasn't until later that I went to live in London, it wasn't until I'd finished university that I went to London, so I was living in Corby in Northamptonshire which is a steel town before that, and I worked as a steel worker for four years since I was fifteen and so before I went to prison I was a steel worker but I wasn't happy, I was unfulfilled and because I always had a creative yearning and potential and I always wanted to be creative and so I also got involved in drink and drugs when I was involved in the peer group and I was very, very unhappy and I drank a lot and I took a lot of drugs and that led me to prison.

*What happened to your parents?*

In Belfast my mum was a cleaner and she used to clean rich peoples' houses in Belfast and my dad worked in a bakery, you know, he was a labourer in the bakery and then when we came to England my dad became a steel worker and my mum was a cleaner and she cleaned factories, she used to clean, you know, the factories, so it was quite a ... it was quite a tough life for them because it was shift work and it was living ... all of us as a family when we

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moved there, the three of us lived in one room in my brother's house so it was ... we lived there for about a year until we got a house so it was very, very tough for us, living in one room, because my brother lived in a three-bedroom semi on an estate and he had two sons of his own and we basically lived in the front room of his house, you know, as a family, so it was hard, it was tight, you know, it was a tough time, and then my dad retired when he was sixty-five and four years later he died of a of a heart attack, of a stroke rather, my mum died of a heart attack a year later, nine months later so it was a tough experience for them, you know, coming as immigrants basically to another culture to another place and then I discovered when my mother died that she was actually Catholic.

*You mentioned it actually, in your pre-plinth interview you ... [?] talked to us about ...*

Yes, my mother was a, I found out that my grandmother was Catholic and a republican and my mother was Catholic, you know, and we found it all and she'd hidden her religion basically, in order to live where we lived, which was a loyalist area, it was on an interface in north Belfast, but you know my mum was absolutely moving us out as a family because she probably feared that people would find out that she was Catholic and we would have been moved out anyway so it was really interesting, I became fascinated then by my own cultural identity and I began to explore that side of my culture when I was at university. I was at university in Birmingham doing drama when my parents died and, you know, they died when I was quite young, twenty, I was in my early twenties and when I found out that my mother was Catholic, suddenly a lot of things were making sense and I began to develop an interest in Ireland, but you know, previously from hating it and not wanting anything to do with it and trying to cut myself off from it, then I began to reconcile myself with it and I began to do courses about Irish dramatists and I began to have an interest in Irish music and then eventually, you know, I started working in Belfast and I made contact with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and I started running courses in Belfast, you know, because I'd been through drama, I'd been through university doing drama at Birmingham University. In 1986 I then became an actor, no, '82 I became an actor but in '86 I won Fringe First and a Perrier Pick of the Fringe Award in Edinburgh as an actor and so I was using some of those skills coming back to Belfast and running workshops and running courses and training for people over here, in Belfast. So I just began to use the skills that I had developed back in my hometown and eventually in '91 I moved back with my wife, as she was then, my first wife, and we moved back to Ireland. She got a job teaching in Trinity in Dublin but I was doing most of my work in Belfast in the communities and I stopped doing professional theatre then and I stopped working professionally as an actor and I moved more and more into community theatre and so because I found

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out that the incredible power of drama and theatre and creativity as a way to transform people's lives and I thought that was much too important just to use for entertainment. So I began doing more and more community theatre and using it with real people, I'm not saying actors are not real people, but I was just using it in a different context and I and I was getting much more out of it because I wasn't challenged as an actor after you know after ... in television it was quite comfortable and I was quite bored with it to be honest so I found working in community theatre much more challenging, much more rewarding, actually I was getting much more out of it, and so I developed that and I let the professional acting go and then eventually I moved into it full-time I suppose and then I went into teaching for a while. I did some teaching at the University of Ulster between '96 and '99 and then in '99 I established the Educational Shakespeare Company because Michael Bogdanov had asked me to start a branch of the company in Belfast. So we swapped 'Educational' instead of 'English' and the rest's history, so to speak.

*Yes, thank you, why do you think your mother would have kept that secret from you and your brother?*

Well, she ... for our own protection is the short answer but my brother was, my brother was twenty years older than me so my grandmother brought my brother up and my grandmother told my brother [?], my grandmother schooled my brother in Irish history and used to take him to the republic plot in Mill Town and tell him that's where the heroes of Ireland were buried so my brother had a schizophrenic upbringing because my grandmother tried to keep her faith and whereas my mother was much more fearful of people finding out about it, my mother was much more fearful of people finding out about it so that's why she kept it a secret, but ultimately that was to protect us.

*Do you need to take care of your child now? Sorry.*

Yes.

*Have you got another baby there which I can't see?*

Yes, I do. This is ... I'm just going to have to take her out of her car seat, this is my daughter Evie.

*Hello gorgeous. Aw, cute, how old is she?*

She's five months.

*Awwww.*

She is five months.

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*Beautiful.*

That's little Evie.

*I think my video got frozen for a minute*

Yes.

*But it doesn't matter because I can see you.*

Oh good, good, well the little thing that was making all this noise.

*She's beautiful.*

Are you going to say hello? But I mean she's usually quiet, you know, she's usually ... she might be okay because I've taken her out of that now but Kristen will be down in a minute.

*Well look I think we're coming up to the end of the interview which has been fascinating in fact I could you probably interview you for the next twenty hours. But I think for the purpose for the website and the [?] we want to write about and explain to the public about the value of the archive it was very good. How has it been like being interviewed today?*

It's just been great, I mean I've enjoyed it and it's really interesting having somebody interested in the work so no I ... I mean it's been fine, I've been really happy.

*Thank you.*