

Interview: Clara

Date Transcribed: 27/03/2022

Interview Duration: 94 minutes

Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Clara

Emotions have been added into the transcript as i.e. [*sadness*] and interviewers have been placed in bold and italicised. Any sections that need to be checked for accuracy such as phrases in other languages or names of places I couldn't confirm the spelling of have been highlighted in red.

Recording started mid-sentence.

C: My best friend lives near Lausanne My second son lives in Lausanne too with his wife. My eldest son lives in (Montreux. I used to live in Lausanne, that's where I did all my work. I went to university in my 20's to study Philosophy, French Literature and Russian and then when I was in my late 40's I went to the Open University and I studied Economics, Finance and Mathematics.

LR: Wow, that's very different things there, you cover the whole range.

Stopped at 0:00:52

Section of conversation was asked not to be transcribed as it's not pertinent to the interview.

Recommence at 00:06:40

LR: Yeah definitely, ok so that's great that sounds really interesting. So yeah I will now share my screen with your artwork and we can start from there perhaps. It's ok, I quite liked your picture actually to be honest. Charlie's the artist here so.

CH: Oh I think it's great, I liked it a lot. I said to Lucia I liked it a lot.

C: So you have a little less colour in that picture than, I don't know if you can see the real thing, it's a bit more colourful because if you look at the whole thing there's some blue through the window and there's also a little bit of yellow.

LR: Ok, I don't know why I can't.

C: Yellow on the skin, she looks very yellow there but actually she's more pinkish but if you want a quality picture my youngest daughter who's doing photography I'll ask her to make a better picture.

CH: Oh that'll be good.

LR: Yes that will be good, because it would be nice to have something more like the original actually because you know the colours are also important and you know they can give you a different impression.

C: Yeah yeah absolutely.

LR: So anyway maybe we can start from there. Maybe if you can talk us through how you came about to finally draw this picture thinking about your lockdown or thinking about Brexit or thinking about both?

C: So the thing is, when, just to put things in a little bit context, before we went into lockdown my husband had cancer in 2019, he had throat cancer.

LR: Oh like mine a couple of years before that.

C: Yes so he was diagnosed in July 2019 and he started this treatment at the mid-end of August and the treatment finished by the end of October but everything went wrong with the treatment. He's fine and he's in remission the treatment itself was extremely damaging to him and he ended up being put in a semi-coma at the hospital for three weeks. It was absolutely horrific. So the thing is when he recovered, he didn't go out. He couldn't go out. He was far too weak physically and also mentally and my husband works for Amazon web services and he has quite a high role. So of course he couldn't go back to work but he was neither a good place there nor physically. He was extremely extremely weak and he couldn't swallow, he couldn't talk, there were lots of things that were not going well so basically he was starting to get better in February/March of 2020 and he hadn't gone out yet because he was still too weak to walk outside and then they announced the lockdown was you know. When Johnson announced lockdown, I was home with my daughters and I had the kid with us that been made homeless with his family and he used to do the army cadets with my youngest daughter and it happened while they were at the army. They both had left since and I helped his family, they were just expelled. They were told you have to get out of the house right now, you're being expelled, you haven't paid your bills and all of them were in the street so it was very complicated because at the time he was under sixteen or just sixteen so the council helped the mother and him to find accommodation but it was among drug addicts and violent people and things like that and I was very worried because his mother was working at night and they were broken into. They had just kind of a small room somewhere so I made a deal with the mother that when she would work at night he would come and stay with us during the week. So he used to sleep at first one or two nights a week and then he ended up sleeping with us like three, four times a week in my house. So when Johnson announced that we were going into lockdown he was with us, he was among the day with us and I said to him you have to decide now if you're staying with us during lockdown which could be going for months or if you go out of the house. If you want to go back to your family. So he said no I'm staying here so he stayed with us. So we were five people in side the house. So there was my husband, me, my two daughters and this young man called Ben and the thing is through the courses, the economic courses I did about international relation we had studied pandemics and epidemics, that's part of the course because despite what people think this, we've been extremely lucky, let's put it that way that we didn't have such a thing before and we have become very accustomed to not having wars and not having famines and not having pandemics and stuff like that but actually if you're looking through time it's a huge anomaly. We have been living in golden age that was not supposed to happen, like the 80's was the golden age financially and it's the outlier and people do not understand that. So basically to tell you the truth I had been preparing my whole family, I'm not a survivalist or anything lets be clear, I'm not a whacko that thinks the worst is going to happen all the time, however I'm kind a defensive person. I have good reason to be. I had a very strange life story but when I was doing my courses in economics I was talking to my family about what I was learning and I taught them about pandemics, I taught them about wars, I taught them about why we had been lucky and also had prepared them to face one day the possibility of a catastrophe. Whatever it was, it could have been climate change, it could have been with you know floodings or extreme temperatures or things like that. I prepared them on the questions on immigration but I had prepared them for questions of pandemic and while I was doing my course at the time you had a Ebola, you had a few cases of Ebola across America and England and I remember one of my sons freaking out and telling me you monster because now is it it you know, Ebola? I think they have reacted in time very quickly, very efficiently but it's a warning. So basically when they announced you know Covid is spread everywhere my kids were like, yep! *[laughing]* We knew that this could do that.

LR: Yeah they were not surprised.

C: They were not surprised, they were not taken aback, nobody's... You can be prepared but not ready if you see what I mean. It's like someone is very ill, close to you, you know they are going to die, you are prepared for it but when it happens you're still not ready and for the pandemic I think it was pretty similar. It was kind of ok, this is happening, how do we do and what do we do now? So we go to organise basically and the thing is while my husband had cancer, because he had had a cardiac arrest in 2015 which had left him, I was scared for a year and a half and he suffered a lot from it and he had memory problems and personality problems and fatigue problems and all sorts of things in communication. So when we knew he had cancer I knew the drill, so I got organised, started stocking food, getting the house ready because I knew I would have less time, drilling with the kids how we were going to act while he had cancer. I organised with my sons who were coming to help me you know with the kids, my youngest child said I don't want to go through this shit again it's too hard so I sent her to Switzerland to stay with her brothers and my best friend. There's a drill let's say so when the pandemic happened I still had food and things stored.

LR: You were very well prepared ok.

C: I was kind of prepared, so basically I wouldn't say it was plain sailing because you know the government started installing this thing where extremely vulnerable people when you ordered food took priority but this took months, this was in the summer.

LR: I remember because I had a good friend who was in that situation and before she could get the deliveries in good time, it took a while to get organised.

C: So I used to order my food once a week but suddenly it became impossible. The slots were all taken for like six weeks in advance so basically I was the only one going out. I was the one, once a week would trek to our supermarket and at the time there was no masks, there were no... They started saying social distancing but people really didn't get that so I would go very early or very late at night and do the shopping I needed to do and it was stressful. For the family it was stressful.

CH: Did you have to que to get in?

C: We had to que to get in, at first it was very messy but then they organised so the trolley was in front of you so you knew exactly what distance you had to had and then very quickly we were able to buy masks and we didn't have fabric masks because they are completely useless. I have lots of friends by the way who are Doctors and Paramedics and all sorts of things so they kind of drilled me what to do and what not to do. At first when the Pandemic happened it was almost good I'm ashamed to say because I was literally on the verge of a nervous breakdown with what had happened with my husband and the organisation. It had taken a lot on me. So I was physically, mentally exhausted and suddenly it was pandemic and I was allowed to stay home and get up when I wanted to get up and uh you know do things at my own rhythm. My daughters was doing an online school one of them, the other one had just started college so suddenly everything was very quiet. So kids would sleep you know until 8 in the morning, wake up, go online to do. We didn't have to have the morning rush, they did their lesson in bed, my husband was recovering he started working, working more and more because that became crazy because there's lots of hacking during the pandemic like during any crisis. So suddenly he was working twelve, sixteen hours a day so everything was running on me but the kids would help me with cooking, cleaning and as for me suddenly, I had this slow rhythm and I loved it, I absolutely loved it. Plus I was unlucky, but lucky, I burnt my hand quite badly with pasta, I was cooking pasta and when I was tipping the water the colander just escaped and I got my hand very badly burnt so I refused to go to hospital because of Covid and I didn't want to bring it back home because my husband was extremely weak and so I had my hand just you know, making those bubbles and the skin breaking and all that.

CH: Oh not good!

LR: Really a bad burn!

C: It was a bad burn but I have enough friends who are doctors so via Facebook messenger and all that they helped me navigate what to do, what not to do. So basically for two weeks I couldn't use my hand at all and it was very sunny so I could go outside and read books. Finally catching up with all the readings that I swore I would do one day, and then once the hand got better I started doing the spring clean of the house which I hadn't had the time to do in a year and with the kids we had lots of time to talk. We decided to do a takeaway night when this was possible you know so it was a little bit special and I started playing. We have a ping pong table which we put in the garden so I start playing with the kids ping pong and it was good, honestly it was good. I lost at the time twelve kilos because we had time to eat quietly, healthily, we started exercising at home you know.

CH: I put weight on! I put loads of weight on.

C: That's the first part. So everything was hunky dory the first lockdown.

LR: It sounds really idyllic. Your husband was recovering.

C: You had so many people suffering and you had for so many people hospitals and we were hearing horror stories and we have friends who had covid and long covid and of course I was worried for my sons because they were working and all sorts of things but we were lucky. We were the very lucky ones and that time I thought ok, it's going to last a few months you know and it seemed we were attacking it the right way, doing the lockdown, putting restrictions, there was the developing the vaccine, so I followed of course the vaccine

made by the open university and the WHO organisation. So I learnt about the vaccine and what they were researching about the vaccine for Covid. So I learnt all about it, I was all excited, we are not far, this is going to happen. I was really optimistic. Then they lifted the lockdown so as soon as it was allowed I visited, one of my daughters decided to come with me and I went to Switzerland to meet my parents, to see my best friend, to see my sister and my nephews, to see my sons. I spent two weeks in Switzerland and basically everything was great. I lived there quite well and then we go slowly towards Christmas. So first the kids went back to school at the end of the summer and I was not happy at all about the measures taken, I thought you know kids were, they were wearing masks but it was, you can see the kids going into school and taking the masks of and stuff like that so my kids were very very careful but I could see that their friends were not and I started to worry about how the pandemic was being regulated basically. You see the vaccines were very near so I was very excited about that. I thought it's not the panacea but it's a great solution coming and we do, so there's a tradition in the family which is all the kids come home for Christmas, all of them. If you have partners and stuff, they take their partners. So I was looking forward to having them all home for Christmas and my younger sister who is actually my step sister had lost her mother during the summer and she wanted to come to me with my nephews for Christmas. She was looking forward to coming and have Christmas here because she didn't want to be alone with her children. So we organise Christmas at my place and then we had the new lockdown happening and when we realised that there was a chance of this happening. It was a Saturday, they announce it Saturday evening, so Saturday afternoon I thought they are going to close the borders. So we called our sons and my sister, my sister said I'm not coming it's too complicated I'm not coming and my sons and the wife of my son said we are ready, we just take our luggage and we jump in the car. We were supposed to come next week but everything is ready, we have the presents everything, we can make it and I calculated that even if they had left, there was little chance of them going through the border before midnight. So the Euro tunnel we always have waiting and I calculated that it was very unlikely that they would make it and even if they had my concern was would they be able to leave because they have work and my daughter in law is doing a masters in trauma, PTSD and stuff like that and she could not be in Switzerland to restart her studies. I said to them I'll leave you the choice but I think it's better if you are not coming, it's safer that you stay where you are. Do Christmas together, do it with my sister and the girls and me we'll do Christmas together and that's when things turned. That's when I don't know, something in all of us broke a little bit our spirit. Until then we had been fairly positive and saying we go through this, whatever happens and when we decided that they were not coming, I said to them I'd rather you don't come and we see each other alive, all of us we are alive than risking having Christmas and then one of us is paying the price. I said let's do the right thing, it's hard but it's just one Christmas and we'll be together next year. Things will get better but I think it was the saddest Christmas I've ever had and trust me I've had really sad ones but that was not fun at all. With my husband and daughters we spent Christmas, we watch Ghost on BBC iPlayer which is a funny series. We just binged it on Christmas day, we put the turkey in the freezer, it was a huge turkey, we couldn't eat it all. We put everything we could in the freezer and we ate what we couldn't put in the freezer. We just didn't care. It was really sad. We opened our presents, watched TV and just prayed for the holidays to pass, it was like that and my eldest son was very very depressed. We are all a bit different in the family my eldest son refused the vaccination, he's not anti-vax but he refused the vaccination in the name of his liberties but all the others are vaccinated. As soon as they could they got the vaccinated so in Switzerland they started putting more restrictions on people who are unvaccinated. You know they had a covid pass and all sorts of things. So suddenly all the things he was still able to do he became not able to do, it was hard for him, it was hard for me because I could not be there. It was difficult for my parents to understand why, they're all past their 80's they wanted to see me and basically we waited during 2021, we were just waiting when can we go to Switzerland and the thing is because it was so un-coordinated. France didn't let anyone in because they closed the, the first time I went in 2020, they have what they call the corridor. The UK corridor, which meant we had special permission if we didn't stop to go through France to go to Switzerland because I don't fly, I drive. Because when I'm in Switzerland I go and see friends and family and I move a lot between cities. It's much cheaper actually to use the car so they closed the corridor. The UK decided that they didn't want it anymore which pfft I don't know way. So you couldn't get into France if you didn't have a special reason and I didn't want to fly because the risk when you're flying are higher than when you're you know in your car. So I was waiting for them to open the border but then the Swiss didn't want to open the border. So if I had gone I would have had to isolate in France for ten days then I had to isolate in Switzerland for two weeks to by the time I was allowed to get out I had to come back so I decided not to go. Plus the price between all the different test you have to do, we calculated it we would have spent just in testing and just in the travel, more than we paid for any holiday so we said alright and we didn't go. So that's when I got fat [laughing]. I had a cardiac scare in the spring. I suddenly had my blood pressure shooting up one day with huge pain in my chest so I was taken to A&E and they discovered I had a little heart

malformation but then they discovered I have little tumours here and there spread throughout my body. We still don't know how bad or benign they are because the NHS didn't carry out the tests they were supposed to do so they kept postponing them and then I had one but they didn't send the report and then they sent the report but they didn't send the pictures so nobody knew what they were talking about and I ended up going private to find out what's happening. So because I was unwell I started exercising less because I was tired, put on all the weight back on and it was... Last year was not a good year I think. I'm not depressed but I was not hunky dory either. I felt lonely without my children and my best friend complained, because she lives alone with her daughter who's in her 20's and she said we're like sisters and I go every year for at least two weeks, if not four weeks to stay with her and she's depressed because I couldn't come and the kids were depressed too. All of us were fairly depressed so it's been a crappy year. 21' has been a crappy year and also you have this feeling that you want things to move forward now, you know I could see via Facebook and elsewhere I had friends inviting me out and I didn't want to go out. My husband is really vulnerable, I didn't want to risk anything so I was like no I can't go out, then I see people say why don't people wear masks and stuff and then put pictures of themselves you know with six other people getting drunk, no mask, no social distancing and then of course they catch covid and they go oh well now it's done. You think yeah it's done but you can catch it again! I found that very frustrating. All these, you can do this but not this and then people interpreting what they can do you know. How far can they push it and you know it delays everything. The government response drove me up the wall, it's so unscientific and I got very frustrated with the whole situation and I can understand people who say you know I've had enough but Covid is still happening. The situation is better but it's very far from being resolved and you have of course the new variant that is more benign allegedly, but it's more benign for people who are vaccinated, non-vaccinated people they still drop. Nothing tells you that the next variant will be more dangerous because you know to overcome Omicron it has to be fairly potent too you know so the risk is not a risk zero. It's not oh it's going down, it's getting better. It's going down now but nothing stops it from re-happening.

LR: Your picture is it about the first lockdown or is it about second lockdown?

C: I think it's about both because basically if you want... so this is me, the picture. I had longer hair and decided to let it go grey during the pandemic like many people did and you can see a little bit I have some grey in the hair now I'm getting completely grey but basically that's the... If you want that's the triviality of life. It's the stuff, the manual tasks, the mindless tasks that can also save you sometimes because it gives you a sense you know. On Fridays, I clean the bathroom, do the dusting, vacuum cleaning, on Saturdays I clean the kitchen, on Sundays I change the sheets so it's these little markers that you have during the week that helps you keep your sanity because you have a rhythm but at the same time when you live like that which is really inside your house and a prisoner there's also the result that every day is the same day. I don't know if you get what I mean. Every day is the repetition of the day before and tomorrow is going to be the same story and suddenly life is absurd, life is absolutely moronic. There's no sense, no rhyme or reason whatsoever.

LR: I never understood before so well, the kind of housewife depressions and frustrations because like you say when the every day life, and house chores become the things that punctuate your time then you get frustrated. I kept saying I'm not a housewife I don't want to have my whole time punctuated by house chores but then I did because I was always stuck in the house!

C: You think if this is what life is you know, how much is it worth living? So when you hit one year or two year of course I prefer doing the washing up than going to war you know in the grand scheme of thing but on the other hand life loses all meaning. The thing is during the pandemic I was, because I do quilting. I like to create things basically. At the moment I'm writing a novel because it keeps me busy and during the pandemic I've been doing quilts, lots of quilts. I was doing a creative quilting course for two years that I started before actually the first bit of the pandemic. I ended the course in 2020 and I was working on my last project when this happened and we had this aim with my husband and daughters to go to Tokyo once things will get better and it was able to move normally and we were looking you know booking the flights and all that and then the pandemic so going nowhere. So I did my project about that. I did a quilt that is two meters forty or twenty long and a meter fifty large because I've been to Tokyo before, I've even been with all of my children. My daughters were two years old and three years old at the time so they don't remember it so they said when we go back for them to discover it and my husband loves Tokyo. So when we go back to Japan. So I did a quilt on that and I even designed the fabrics and designed the project and all that sort of things. I can send you a picture of it if you want to see it.

CH: I'm interested in your picture, your drawing because it kind of reminisces me as well. Quite often I get the impression that a lot of women took the forefront of being in the kitchen and looking after the family and organising and doing stuff. It was the same in my household actually I'm embarrassed to say. My partner Helen would go and do all the shopping and bla bla bla and yeah.

C: What we call in French, you have the emotional load the mental load which are the two aspects of what you're describing and you had the emotional load is the part where the women take the responsibility for the wellbeing of the family, maybe mental with but including organisation, education, decisions to take them to the doctor, vaccination all sorts of things. Then you have the mental load of the organiser, the person who has to anticipate whether all the needs of the family and basically have to do not only the task, not just the doing of the washing, the cleaning, the cooking, the shopping but also have to think about what the needs of the family are. So it's not just my needs that are implied it's you know what do the kids want, what does my husband want, what does the cat want and how do I organise all of that.

CH: You look very serene here though, you don't look stressed.

C: I don't look stressed but if you look I have this little thing under my eyes which is I'm tired. I'm not great at drawing but there's also a fatality in it. I'm looking through the window and the window is nice and blue, will try and send you the picture, nice and blue and kind of shiny outside. So it's the expectancy of one day I'll be delivered and I will be able to be out and in the meantime let's purify everything, let's clean everything, let's make everything nice and shiny and ready but there's also a tiredness.

CH: Were you obsessed with cleaning, like making sure everything was clean like in terms of Covid.

C: Yes. So I was not as paranoid as some of my friends who went food shopping and you know will disinfect everything when it would come in, clean the bottles of milk and all that. I didn't do that. I did wear a mask. I was the one you know getting the shopping, brining it in then the kids will put them where they went but I will disinfect the doors, the door handles and all that. Kept the windows open as much as possible but also we were extremely careful. We didn't see anybody inside our house. We had no guests. For the past two years no body has come for a meal or to stay with us or anything. I have my sons have come for Christmas, two of them have come for Christmas and funnily enough the one living in London, got Covid. He came and it was a weird story. He was living in London with three other people. One of them got Covid in November, end of November. So they all put themselves into quarantine, didn't go out, they all through we are getting it you know. It's you know worse so let's wait until we all have it and we go out. The girls who had it, had it bad despite the fact that she was vaccinated. She was quite ill for two weeks but after two weeks none of them were positive, she was the only one. So she left and went to her family once she got better and by then they were two weeks away from coming home and my son said listen I'm teaching online at the moment to university students so I'm not going out, I'll keep isolating so when I come home I'm sure I don't have Covid. I went ok! He did a PCR test on the 22nd December, received the 23rd and said I'm ok! So my husband went to pick him up so he didn't have to take public transport. He came home, my eldest son, the one who's not vaccinated had arrived from Switzerland a week before. He was in quarantine and all that. He had tested negative so we were all fine. Twenty four, we did it the Swiss way which is you anticipate Christmas, you open one or two presents, you eat nice things. We play games and I noticed my son did not look well, the youngest. I said are you alright because he was sniffing a lot and he looked a bit unwell. He said yeah I'm just tired I stayed up late to just finish work before I came don't worry and he said but I'll go to bed early. So I said ok, we went to bed and the twenty fifth we get up early with my husband to you know prepare turkey bla bla and I receive a text on my phone and it's my son who says ok don't panic I tested positive for Covid this morning. I woke up not feeling well and I'm positive. So he stayed locked up in his room for twelve days. He had it quite bad, he had the two vaccine, he hadn't had the booster and I was worried at some point. You could hear him struggling to breath and we bought an oximeter and stuff like that and it was just limit limit so we called the NHS and they said no he's alright so still keep him but if he goes under this number he has to come and we were worried but he stayed in his room and thank god over Christmas it was very mild so we kept all the windows open. He stayed in his room, got out, he had a little toilet next to his room so we were away from it but we stayed downstairs and he was upstairs an when he would need the shower we would all leave upstairs, stay downstairs, lock all the doors, he would have his shower, disinfect and we would leave all the windows open and an hour and a half after he had gone back to his room I would go up with a mask and gloves and all that. Clean everything he could have touched, cleaned the whole bathroom and then we would wait another hour all over and none of

us caught it. We were very lucky but he was unwell and when he left he was still very weak. You do what you can.

LR: Yes absolutely and it's a lot of work on you because you have to disinfect everything.

C: Yeah well. I was more worried about him than the work to do. So yeah if you want my drawing is a little bit of a reflection of that.

CH: Can you tell us how it felt for you during the Brexit referendum?

C: Alright so because of my knowledge, my studies... well I knew it was going to happen, let's put it this way.

CH: Why did you think that?

C: Because I read the Daily Mail. I'm not your Daily Mail reader, I don't read by pleasure but I read everything. I read the guardian, the independent, the economist, the BFT but I read the Daily Mail. The only reason I do is because it gives you a good idea about what a lot of people think and I don't like it but when there was talk about Brexit my friends, the people I'm friends with were against Brexit but my husband who is a runner, does marathons you know go to park run and stuff like that, I could hear what his friends were saying and reading the Daily Mail and looking at the arguments that the anti-Brexit or the Remainers were doing their arguments I realised that lots of people had no clue what the European union was about or how it functions. They had real misconceptions about immigration, it was really... It was really racist basically what I could hear around me and see around me. It was... I just knew it was going to happen. When my husband went to vote he voted against of course but we had a discussion. He said what do you think about Brexit? Is it a good thing or is it a bad thing? So I tried to explain to him what were the pros and the cons being as balanced as I could but I was like... it's going to be a catastrophe. My husband was convinced you know that people would vote against leaving the European Union and we woke up around five in the morning, the day after the referendum and I was like I don't wana' know because I know and my husband was no no its not possible and he opened his tab at the news and he was in tears. He was so shocked and I was heartbroken. I was heartbroken. I was like well, they made their choice, they don't know what choice they made actually because the people I spoke with were telling me why they thought we should leave, you know the arguments were very racist, they were well we have too many immigrants and I would say what is the proportion of immigrants in the UK? Do you know that? And they would say oh there's at least forty percent, thirty percent, thirty five percent. I was just like no it's not or they would say yeah but it's a weight on the NHS and you would say yeah but you have also immigrants working in the NHS.

LR: A lot of them. A lot of people in the NHS are immigrants.

C: It was, oh they were saying things like yeah but you know Europeans don't need to come here, why should we let them come here, we should open our frontiers to people like Indian you know, from India or from Africa and you would go yeah right! You really think what you're saying because of course two minutes later they will tell you that they don't want them either. The reasoning was staggering. When you would ask them what law do you think we should repeal about the EU you know they didn't know. They would talk about bendy bananas and stuff like that which didn't exist. There are things from EU that were not great you know, the first that come on the top of my mind which is the tiny things, it's the fact that EU has imposed taxes on e-books. There were no taxes on e-books and then they put taxes on e-books, why! You have these tiny things but people don't know about that. It's not important in the grand scheme of things. So yeah, and once the shock had passed. I was not shocked but my family was, I think it was two or three days after the referendum I went to WHSmith in the centre of Ipswich and it was nine in the morning, it was sunny. There was this old couple that came in and there was a big title, I think it was the Daily Mail or whatever which was we won't get over it or something like that and the old guy said to his wife, what is they don't understand, they lost, they have to fuck off and go back to their country. They're not wanted here, it's over. I was holding a German magazine and I was right behind him at the till and he was ranting, absolutely oblivious but his wife saw me and saw the magazine and she was very uncomfortable. She was very very uncomfortable and I thought, the fact that someone, because you wouldn't have thought that this guy, you know he was like your normal retiree, middle class retiree and the way he spoke and all that. He had some medication and he was so violent, he was so full of hate and I didn't like it. Then people in shops started asking me, they had never done it, I had been Ipswich for years, for ten years and they started telling me where are you from, oh you have an accent, where are you from and people saying well you have to go back now, you have to go back. I would say go back where? I'm

Italian, I've never lived in Italy so where am I supposed to go back to and my friends and family, they didn't take it very seriously. I told them you know, I'm feeling less and less comfortable and one day I went to see a movie, it was in October, I went to see a movie with my daughters and my husband and we were walking, we were coming back home, walking through the town centre and there was two guys, one being extremely tall and quite strong and they were obviously drunk and they were grabbing people and they were saying "British only for British people! Where are you from, where are you from!". My husband is very tall, my husband is very tall, my husband is 6t 4" and he was walking ahead of me with my youngest daughter and I was with my eldest daughter and this guy was grabbing everybody basically so when he saw my husband he avoided him because he wasn't as tall as he was but there was some distance between me and my husband and I said to my daughter, keep talking because my kids were born here, they did their studies here, they have more of an accent you see they speak English perfectly as well. I mean my daughters are British, my sons are European. My daughters are dual national but my sons are European and I said to my daughter keep talking, you're not asking questions just keep talking about anything until we've passed these guys and so she did, she talked about the movie I like this but I could see she was stressed and once we'd passed my husband, that's when the penny dropped in. That's when he realised he hadn't seen what was happening because he didn't want to see. You see people don't want to see that. After that I became very careful, in shops I stopped talking basically.

LR: Really!

C: Yeah I would go with my daughter and she would tell people what we wanted because I have this little accent. I even looked into in Cambridge, there's a woman in Cambridge that gives lessons to loose your accent, to speak English like an English person so I looked into and my family went absolutely berserk when they heard I wanted to do that. They were like you're not doing it, this is silly, this is crazy and I was like it might be a necessity at some point you know and they were like no you don't do it. I'm more relaxed now but I have lost a lot of friends. I've lost a lot of friends.

LR: Really, why is that?

C: There are people I am not talking to anymore because they are so pro-Johnson, pro-Brexit and what kills me is there are people that were telling me things like oh you know, you will have the animal bill act and we will have better environmental protection and I was like no this is not going to happen and I can explain to you why. It's because of the chemicals. We don't produce any chemicals here. We do, we mix them, pharamceuticals and all that but we need to import the chemicals we need to combine them and we need and I was explaining to them the process of how this was working and why we were going to fail. Why in trade our living standard, the choice is keeping our high living standards but this is expensive so if you want meat you know that is well treated, animal cattle that has been well treated, no hormone treatments and all that, this is costly. The trade agreements that we have with the EU which I knew was coming you know, I knew they wanted a hard Brexit. I was telling people what we are planting here, we will not be able to afford, we will have to buy it who's living standards are much lower than us because we won't be able to afford it, the inflation is going to be crazy and people didn't believe me! That's the worst!

LR: Now it's happening!

C: Of course it's happening but it was so obvious and there are so many levels of things like that. About environment, about food quality, about work, about employment and unemployment and I mean when you don't... In economics, in one of my foundation books of economy, when you open the introduction, it's funny because people never read the introductions but it tells you a lot. One of the first pages of the introduction was saying that there's two best kept secret in economies that you cannot tell publicly that it will create such a backlash which is a country that has let immigrants come freely in is always richer than economies that want to stop immigration and the second thing is that actually globalisation is actually a good thing. Globalisation has erased more than fifty percent of poverty across the world. People do not realise it because they mix up the problems of supply you know because we came... There's this idea that supply comes from far away so we are making China richer and all that. The problem is that we are not making China richer or Vietnam or Cambodia or whatever, the problem is that we have come to a way of thinking where we have this next day system delivery where instead of having warehouses where we store what we need and anticipate, we erased all that and we're used to we order something and next week we will receive it so when the pandemic happened for example you know you just need a very tiny disruption for this to have a domino effect and this happened and people are mixing these things. They don't understand how one thing leads to another, leads to another. It can be about environment, it can be about economics, it can be about finance, it can be about

immigration, it can be about socialisation. It's very difficult when you start this discussion because as articulate as I can be it's very tiring to explain that to people.

LR: Most of them don't want to know. You know my impression is that people voted for Brexit. They're not even interested really in all these problems.

C: No because they voted for opportunities. The people I know who voted for it, voted for opportunities. When you ask them, what they mean by that, they don't know. They just say oh I just feel optimistic! So then of course it becomes very easily to blame the remainder for souring the situation or we're dragging down the country because the aims that were fit before the referendum suddenly were erased because they were of course not possible so suddenly it was like we want better. What do you want better? Of course I want my life to be better.

LR: Everybody does.

C: Yeah so you can blame everybody else because you don't have a target, you don't have a specific aim so it's very easy to move the goalposts.

CH: So did you actually apply for the EU settlement scheme?

LR: Oh yes.

C: Sorry?

CH: Did you apply to the EU settlement scheme?

C: Yeah yeah I have the settled status and it was you know what. It took me, I knew because I'm part of a group called EUsen on Facebook which is, well you had this three million right on Facebook and then there's a group that kind of separated themselves from this three million because they didn't like what they were doing.

CH: What's it called sorry?

C: They are called EUsen and now you can find them on Facebook and they called Love EUsen and basically this group was founded by immigration lawyers who decided to help European to achieve settled status and they do it freely so they built a website which from a security point is not great but thank god you don't have to register under your real name, you give a you know, you can call yourself JoJo Rabbit and basically they help you achieve settled or pre-settled status and they help you so if you need to have your parents join you they help you find out what is the law and how to do the applications. So I was following them, I discovered them right after the referendum, I discovered first the three million then I discovered the Love EUsen so I started following them, being part of the groups and they told us immediately when the settlement was open, you know they told us what to do, what not to do, how it worked, they explained everything but I was absolutely paralysed. I couldn't do it! I was freaking out because I'm not very tech savvy. My husband is thank god but I was not so I really struggle at the idea of doing it. I wanted to do it, you see I wanted to become British actually so I had in 2015 I did my life in the UK test which I passed and I was on to do the rest. I had the CSI which is the private insurance, health insurance I was aware of that because I went regularly to check. What I was shocked about when I officially came to live here was that, I said where do I register you know to live here because in Switzerland or in Italy or in Germany or in France you can't just go there, have a flat or a house and sit and say I'm living here. You have to declare yourself at the commune or the council or whatever and then you have to prove that you have the means to live there so either you have to have already a work or enough money to live on. So when I came I had enough money to live on anyway, I had put money on the side but I discovered that there was no registration. I was like what do you mean? The only registration I had to do was the national insurance and I went to see them, saying so are you the immigration and they were like no no we're national insurance. So I went to do the course and finally understood what national insurance was about but I was like nobody was asking anything! So when people complained we are being invaded I was like yeah but in any other country this is regulated. You can't blame people for coming here because it's easy when you made it easy.

LR: Yeah they went from one extreme to the other so between letting everyone in with no registration and going out of Europe there was a lot of things they could have done in the middle without you know getting to that extreme.

C: Yeah to that extreme and you know it's like when Morrison did the meal that was without EU salt and pepper, have you heard about that? I said alright, boycotting Morrison then, it's as simple as that. I will never forgive them for that. What sense does it make, it's just racism!

LR: I know, I'm doing the same things, I will never set foot, well I will never buy any Dyson product even though I know they are very good products but I don't like him because he's a firm Brexiteer and also I never set foot in a Weatherspoon restaurant or pub at all because I know he's a terrible Brexiteer and I'm trying to persuade my son to stop going to those pubs but you know it's just a little thing I can do against them.

C: I don't go to Weatherspoon, my husband don't go to Weatherspoon and my kids don't have Weatherspoon. We do have Dyson which we bought before the referendum and I will never buy Dyson again. The worst of it is I never met a Brexiteer that makes sense you know. If somebody was explaining to me, the reasoning, about economics immigration, whatever that made sense you know. Saying that we should have or we should regulate immigration I go yes of course. Every other country on the earth does it! Of course you regulate immigration but if regulation is populism where we throw out immigrants and you know we say they are bad people, we represent them as the source of all your issues then no this isn't regulation this is lambasting, this is like you know, dehumanizing and I refuse that and like you say we should regulate immigration, we should have a certain number of immigrants that can come here, fine. I see nothing wrong with that because I don't know any other country that doesn't do it but when you see...

LR: Sorry to interrupt you but I'm interested in this. Did that change the feeling you had about the UK because you obviously came here, decided to come here and you must have had some sort of attachment to the UK or some idea in your mind about the UK and I would like to know whether Brexit changed that?

C: Yes. So I'm going to be honest with you, when I came to the UK I was an idealist and I thought everything was lovely. I love English literature I was a huge fan of the classics. I came the first time when I was nine, for four days with my mother, her sister and my friend. I absolutely loved London, I was crazy about London. I came back the first time I left Switzerland on my own, I had a boyfriend. We saved an entire summer just to spend one week in London and we went to buy jeans and shirts and records and we were so happy, we were so cool. So I had this image and then when I started having fertility problems, my first husband knew some doctors in London through South France and they recommended the doctor I went to and of course this guy was so much better than the doctors from Switzerland and I had my children so I was very grateful for this system that made it because I went private but compared to Switzerland at the time it was really really cheap and I was amazed at all the knowledge they had. You know in Switzerland they were giving me medication and the doctor I had here was saying why are they giving you that it's complete madness it's absolutely not made for you, this is just an add and I would say how do you know and he would say because I'm one of the researcher on that and I know exactly what it does you know. I was never scared. When I was in Switzerland during my pregnancy I had eclampsia with all my children which is a nightmare and I had several miscarriages. I have five kids I had eight miscarriages. In Switzerland doctors would say don't have children you know, what are you thinking don't do it. In England they would say ok this is going to be hard but let's do things right you know. It was always positive, it was always open, it was always very progressive, I loved it. When I came to live here, the people I met, the thing is I was living in London. So London is a very open city, they are not racist, or at least they don't show it. You can go, I had friends who were black, I had friends who were brown, I had friends who were Arab and I had friends and they would come and see me and we would go you know, we were going to shops and they were served very nicely whereas in Switzerland or elsewhere I had seen them being treated you know with disrespect. It was lovely! Absolutely lovely! Once I had a cleaning lady, she came with me, she was Algerian, when one of my sons was, well I had my two young sons. She came to help because I had cancer of the cervix and I needed an operation and my first husband thought that he wouldn't be able to deal on his own with the kids. They were very small so he asked her if she wanted to come with us and of course she said yes, wow going to England. So she came with us and one day we were in the hotel because we stayed for five days because I had to recover and all that and the day before we came home I stayed in the hotel with my sons and all that and she asked if she could go for a walk, well you know I was there my husband. So she went to, we were not far from Harrods and she went down Sloan Street where you have the very expensive shops and she went into each and every one, she went in and look at things and she came back and she just loved England. She said you know, because she did look like a cleaning lady you know, she obviously wasn't wearing branded clothes and stuff but she said everywhere she went they were very nice with her, very polite, very you know very welcoming. At the end she asked, at the end I think it was Dior she asked how come you are so nice to me? I'm not going to buy anything why are you so nice to me and they said

to her one why wouldn't we! She was like I would like to live here, they are so lovely. So there was this image, it was a little bit deceiving but on the other side when I was in Switzerland, Swiss history is very small and very simple and it doesn't last very long you see. So what we learn is European country, we learn about Italy, Germany, France and England and Spain right. So I knew a lot about the second world war and I knew a lot about how the second world war is not as idyllic as people here believe it is you know. They completely ignore what they did to Czechoslovakia, they completely the big part the Polish people played in winning the war or with Enigma or about spying, more than fifty percent of spies that were abroad were Polish people because they spoke German so they infiltrated Germany and people here ignore all that side of things. So when I came here and I hear talks of the war because god do they love to talk about you know they saved the world. It was always that, I was always a little bit taken aback because it didn't fully fit with what I had learnt in school and also after school I learned a lot because one of my great uncle, part of the family is Jewish and German so during the second world war well my grandma was in Switzerland and she was in her early twenties and she realised after Kristallnacht what was happening. So she called her youngest brother and she said we have to go get Oppa and Oma and bring them back to Switzerland because they were rich, they took the car, drove all night to Germany, grabbed their parents, said take everything you can in the car, so they took the jewellery and whatever money they had and whatever they had of value, put in the car and drove back. Never came back and my great uncle decided to go to England to offer his services, because he said he had trained as a pilot. So he went to England to offer his services to fight against the Nazis and they kindly put him in a camp [laughing] with other German where he stayed for two years or three years and then one day they came and they didn't have enough Pilots and they didn't have enough people fighting so they offered who wants to fight for us and in exchange they gave them a British passport so he's among the pilots who bombarded Dresden and then he came back and he lived here for twenty years and then he left and went to live somewhere else. So I knew about these things and I didn't have such a charming image of the war as lots of people have here. I loved England, I love a lot of things about it. It was wonderful. In Switzerland you don't have this opportunity to go to University when you're forty years old. My friends and family kept telling me you're absolutely mad! Why are you doing that you know and they kept telling me oh you stop that nonsense have you. Whereas people here are were like oh that's great keep doing, what else have you learnt you know. It was all positive. Then you had little things like I was doing workshop to learn quilting, because in Switzerland we don't learn much. I learned knitting and crochet and that was it but when I went to England I discovered you can learn anything you want. I learnt to make bread you know, I learnt to make quilt and sewing and all sorts of things. So I was doing that workshop and not always but very often there was one woman among all the women who would always say things like I don't understand what you say, what are you saying, I don't understand your accent. Everybody else could understand me I was even teaching! I was teaching finance and economics and business studies to A levels and she was telling me I don't understand your accent, what is she saying? So when she went to the loo the other women would tell me, we do understand you, it's her we don't understand. She's from Yorkshire or whatever and we don't understand a word she's saying. Then you had the cuppa' the cuppa' is a big classic for a foreigner. Clara do you want a cuppa? Yes please. Oh do you know what a cuppa' is? It's an English tradition of course you don't know it. I would say what do you mean I don't know it? Your father die, it's a cuppa', you go to a new job, cuppa', new toilet, cuppa' you know. I know what a cuppa' is and I know what it's meant for you know but that came very often. The cuppa' thing. Oh do you want a cup of tea oh you foreigner, you don't know about the cup of tea. What is there to know about the cup of tea you know. So you had this tiny things happening, from here and there but not often. People were usually very nice, men are very complimentary. Oh you have a nice accent, you're French, French is sexy you know. Of course I'm older now, I'm much less sexy but it was charming so I loved England. That's where I get my children you know and I love my husband who's very British. I was happy here. I never thought I would want to leave one day. I was someone who travelled a lot and suddenly England was my home and I found this house and I thought, this is where I'm going to die basically and when Brexit happened then first there's the distrust between Remainers and Brexiteers. The discussions, the avoidance of discussion. Among the people I know I don't know anyone who still say they are Brexiteers, they avoid it, they avoid the subject. I even had noticed some people who were strong Brexiteers who pretended they voted for remain which makes me laugh because I know it's a lie but I don't say anything. It's difficult because you're avoiding the discussion because it immediately leads to everybody heating up including me I have to be honest. You know when I start talking about it I get heated up and then when I had to do the settled status it was so difficult to do for me. It took me a long time to gather the information. When they announced they will do that I went to the banks because my working is very patchy because of my husband I've been his carer several times and also I was self employed. So I didn't have P60's and 45 and god knows what so it was difficult to prove that I had enough money to live here that I had CSI and that I had no problems, we all did. The organisation was so hard! So I would go to the Bank and ask can

I have the paper proof for these years and they say we don't do it! I would be like what do you mean you don't do it. Oh you have to pay for it and then I had to wait three months and then they had forgotten about what I had asked and I had changed banks so it was so difficult. It was so painful and I was freaking out and when the pandemic happened, one day I said to my husband can you take a day out and help me with that because just the idea I'm shaking and he said do you have what you need and I said I think I do but I don't know how to zip the files and all that so he did it with me and actually it was fairly smooth and what it was sent I was like well if they say no what do I do. They said yes, it came within a week. It was a huge, huge relief. My youngest son had a friend who was a lawyer so he helped him do it. He was very relieved with me, we were both like whew it's done.

LR: They made it difficult.

C: Very difficult and that was unpleasant and to be honest with you, since Brexit happened, if I didn't have my husband because he doesn't want to leave I'm not sure I would stay. The problem is I don't know where I would go but I have days where I think I do not want to leave you know, this is my place now. I have three children living here. I have friends, I have everything and I have days where I think I don't know how long I can still take it. What's happening. It's a very difficult. It's weird because I don't want to go. There's still so much good in it. A lot of people are actually really nice people you know and there's a solidarity and there's a lot of things that I've found absolutely gorgeous in England but Brexit has re-set things in a way and it's like if I... I had a peek once or twice behind the curtain and they suddenly pulled the curtain and you go oh my god you know.

LR: The cuppa' episodes and things like that the little glimpses and now all of a sudden the whole stage has opened up. Yeah.

C: Yes, and there's a lot of things. You know you have the Windrush problems, with the settled status we have the same thing. So many people cannot access their data or asking to share the code for work and housing and it doesn't work and they can't prove it. My son, the youngest, the national insurance had registered him under the wrong birth date and he had jobs that he couldn't do because the settled status when they checked and went to the national insurance it didn't work so he was knocked out and lost lots of jobs. It took six months to fix, six months! He went absolutely berserk. It's terrifying that we are at the mercy of any whim, that we don't even have a paper proof because you know come on it's so easy to erase someone.

LR: That's very unsettling for me, not having a piece of paper saying that I do have settled status and having to resort to all these codes on the computer. What if the internet is not working at that moment or you know whatever. Still you're thinking you might go for the citizenship?

C: No. Since Brexit I've dropped it. If they kick me out then I'll go away. It's funny because I was all for it and you know. Then my husband had his cardiac arrest so for 18 months I just looked after him day and night, I was absolutely knackered and I was still thinking I'm going to do it and then Brexit happened and my husband was saying do it now. Of course they've changed because the British citizenship requirement since I have arrived have changed more than three hundred and fifty times. I kept checking and every time they said something different, there was always a tweak here, a tweak there and then they changed this and they changed that. Then my husband said you're going to become British and I said you know what, if they don't want me I don't want to be part of that.

CH: Clara are you missing mainland Europe?

C: No. I'm from nowhere. You know when May said you are a citizen of nowhere, I am a citizen of nowhere. I never really felt at home anywhere so when I came to England I made my home you know. With my children, my husband, I finally when we built that house. I was like finally this is my home and then pfft this happened so I was like oh well.

CH: Yeah I'm sure Lucia was going to ask you about Home?

LR: Yeah well, yeah. One of the things we ask our participants if you had to tell us where your home is, where would you say it is?

C: I would say home is where my husband is.

LR: OK, so your husband is there where you are now.

C: It's not a place anymore. It's where the people I love most are and my husband is the person I love most so home is where he will be. If by miracle he decide to leave I will definitely follow him but I don't feel at home anymore anywhere. I know it is difficult but if I had to leave tomorrow I would leave tomorrow. I've lost this feeling that I'm anchored now.

CH: What do your children feel? Do they feel European or British?

C: So it's an interesting question because they all feel pretty much European including my British daughters. I managed to get them their Italian passports just actually this year. I didn't see the necessity before and during the pandemic it became very difficult so finally I managed to get that but my sons it's weird because they grew up here and they felt really British but when Brexit happened two of them left. They said it had nothing to do with Brexit but they are not particularly satisfied in Switzerland either and one of them is talking about coming back actually. The other one says I will not stay in Switzerland all my life but they feel pretty much European. My daughters too, they are quite proud to be Italian despite the fact that they speak only English. My sons speak French and English and two of them speak a little bit of Italian too but my daughters speak only English sadly but they are kind of proud to say they are European.

LR: I think it's great that they have both passports. I did the same for my son, my son was born in Italy, he came here and now he's got both passports. It's so handy and also thinking about their future if they want to work in Europe it's much better to have an Italian passport because it's a European passport. Whereas I think if you only have the British passport I think it might be more difficult to find jobs there if you want to go back to Europe.

C: At least they have more opportunities. It's really bad, all these people have been deprived of the possibility of going abroad, living abroad, finding jobs abroad, studying abroad. I found that you know the fact that they took away Erasmus is a tragedy. Absolute tragedy. Now you see, even in Ipswich they look for people who speak foreign languages because kids don't want to learn foreign languages anymore.

LR: That's right.

C: It's really sad.

LR: It is sad. I am co-ordinating the Erasmus here in my school and of course it's dying out. I think we've got one more year of funding and that's it we're finished. It's supposed to be replaced with this touring programme which is funded by the British government but the money is not like, maybe a quarter of what was available on Erasmus and it's much more competitive and I don't think as many people will be able to benefit from it as from Erasmus which was a great programme I think.

CH: No definitely.

LR: Anyway I think, that could do. Charlie do you have anything?

CH: Yeah no I don't have anymore questions.

C: Well you know where to find me.

LR: Yeah Clara thank you that was great, thank you.

End of interview

End of Transcript