

Interview: Sandra

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Sandra

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.

CW: This transcript contains mention of domestic abuse and mental health issues.

CH: *Ok we're recording.*

LR: *Ok.*

S: I'm not great at drawing as you probably noticed. [chuckles]

LR: *No but it's an interesting picture that you'll have to explain to us in your own words.*

S: Ok so that's what you want me to do now? Just explain the picture? Right so when you asked me to draw something about the first lockdown and how I felt. I had an idea. The first thing I pictured in my mind was the pulling towards home so I had to tried to draw that with my hand going there and my hair going there, there's no wind. It's a feeling going and being pulled towards home and my kids, and I'm going to get emotional thinking about it, it was so hard emotionally that time. [*voice breaking and close to tears*] I knew I didn't want to think about it but that's what I'm here to do. The wait, because I cannot go because my children are here you know they are British and that's why I got stuck here so far you know. For this side of family, cause I could have left. I wanted to leave years back and then I got pregnant and then I got stuck here again for the third time in a row, trying to leave for nine years. So I didn't think at all my kids, I was already stuck that was a fact right. I was here and there was this huge blue dark barrier, the yellow is not because there's anything happening but just to create some movement because this to me represents physically the tunnel so the water. It represents the sea of words and nonsense and confusion and that's why I scattered letters over it and it's just I couldn't get through. I couldn't get through and for the first time since I've been living abroad which was, let me think, seven to eight years I missed home. I really missed it. For that melancholy that was horrendous. I cried for days I never miss home that way before. Yeah I miss my friends, I miss my family but not see them and that time I didn't know if I would see them again. You know it was so terrifying. So that hole was because my heart was broke in two. [*voice breaking - very emotional*] There's half of my heart which is here with me and the other half was there where my family home is. Kinda' try to picture it a bit but it doesn't resemble it too much [*laughing nervously*] just the steps to get to the door. Yeah so I tried to make myself look sad because that's how I was. Absolutely sad.

LR: *And is that a broken heart you have in your chest?*

S: Yes. Well that's this [*voice breaking*] it's been [*verge of tears*] it's a hole cause my kids are my heart and my mum and dad are my heart. I don't really have I've got one granny and you know very few people that are really really clear about other you know cousin or so and close friends. They are family to me but there are not a lot of people there. They are still very very important to me and I remember being terrified for my dad, absolutely terrified for my dad cause' my mum is younger, like eleven years younger, just a bit and she's overall healthy. Although she's a bad smoker but my dad's had several heart surgeries, his health's not in the right place, he's in his seventies. So I was terrified that something could happen to him and I wasn't there and I couldn't reach. It was just this sense of uh... [*long pause*] I couldn't do anything. I was trapped. I don't know like my freedom was taken from me like I couldn't go home if I wanted to and for like going home should be a right not an option you know. So this is what I managed to put on it.

LR: Very interesting I think. I haven't understood the meaning of this blue patch in the middle and now I understand it's the channel and I'm really interested about what you mean about the confusion and the sort of rambling of words in the middle.

S: All the Covid information that was coming through and you know for quite some time I did listen to the new. It took a while before I realise I better stop and I did eventually but for weeks and weeks and weeks I daily looked at updates and how

many cases were there and how many cases in I where I am currently, cases in the area of my current. It was crazy man and how it was going on Italy, where were they at, where were the biggest number of people. Then it depends on who you listen to you hear different things, so it's ridiculous and the end of the day I was just overwhelmed I couldn't even understand anymore that well really what was going on. So that's the confusing bit and the unknown. It was just *[makes fart noise to indicate feeling rubbish and flat]*.

LR: Yeah. Yeah I was the same. I was almost obsessed with listening to the news and yeah and reading about the data and all that you know. It was, really bad. So how did you go through that time, how did you manage to cope?

long pause

LR: If you did.

S: Psychotherapy, no I'm thinking. Psychotherapy sure. So that was March, March it hit. When did we first go, it was March we first went in lockdown?

CH/LR: Yeah.

S: Yeah. So definitely definitely ... *[pause]* well I've got a ... a support network because well generally I've had psychotherapy for years but even more so with supervision also uni supervision groups you know a lot of places were urm and then eventually in May I broke up with my ex which was A very person in my life so that meant I had constant support because of that so I could take in everything. So I started seeing my therapist every week, the health visitor was here every week. The domestic abuse adult person was calling me every week so I guess I navigated everything because I had a very big scaffolding you know of mental health support. I was being worried for my dad especially. I remember talking about it in large groups and other groups at uni. Urm... that helped. Urm... So definitely talking about it in the right way to the right people helped? Because there was nothing I could practically change so I could only try to lower my anxiety levels and you know... *[sounding very low and sad]*

LR: Did you keep in touch with you dad with your family somehow?

S: Oh yes, we video call daily and I remember telling my dad off a million times going *[chuckles]* you're only allowed to go out for food and medicines so they would go out every bloody day. One day they would buy milk and next day will buy bread and I was like what the fuck? Just go and got a weekly shopping please but they're like no no I'm ok I've got my filtering mask, I don't touch anything, I'm constantly sanitising my hands which I'm sure they did because he's a pharmacist he's not a idiot he know what is... but *[short laugh]* I'm like urghhhh! It was like so frustrating for me I just wish they stayed home you know because they got a big enough home to be able to run around the two rooms if they wanted to, you know what I mean it's just like *[sigh]*.

LR: Yeah I know it was really scary.

S: It was scary.

LR: I mean my mum is eighty seven and I even got to the point of telling her to stop seeing her carer because I was afraid that the carer could give her it. So...yeah and she needs a carer but I said look just you know worry about the house, don't worry about anything just stay away from everyone and it's tough, yes. Charlie do you want to ask anything?

CH: Yeah your story is challenging. What was happening with your kids at that time?

S: Well my urm... so... We're talking 2020, so my youngest wasn't even one.

LR: Wow.

S: So I think he was nine months when we got Covid. We were about to get him baptised just about and go in lockdown. He got baptised Sunday this past, two years later. *[long sigh]* It's hard to think about my family because I was in a very bad family situation here. So I had no I could just talk about this at home. My kids were attending part of them nursery. Urm.... I have a foggy memory around that. I have a strong memory of how I felt about mum and dad and how worried I was for my dad and how stuck I felt and caged probably is more appropriate than stuck. My kids were just there, they were just little like very little.

CH: How many kids do you have is it two or?

S: Two. So Lorenzo would have been just two and a few months and *(child's name??)* wasn't even one. Yep. Very little kids at the time so full on caring for them twenty four hours a day. I think they were two days a week at nursery then when I was studying. I was attending class the whole day and then used the other day to do my uni work pretty much. So I was always doing something like working or caring for them.

CH: Ok. We're interested in your mood at that point. What was your kind of?

S: I think it's a bit desperate because of then I stopped... did I stop uni? I didn't stop right away the nursery did they? Did they close?

CH: No.

LR: I can't remember.

S: I think they were open for a bit and then they closed.

CH: They were.

S: Because I think I remember them still being at nursery and I was still attending. Forgive me if I say something imprecise you know while.

CH: No don't worry.

S: I think they were still in nursery.

CH: Were you kind of desperate then?

S: Yeah.

CH: Ohkay. So on the right of the channel between Aberdeen and Italy, whereabouts in Italy are your family from then?

S: Liguira.

CH: Ok where's that then?

S: It's north west, like not too far from France. It's the region that has a border with France by the sea.

CH: Oh ok.

S: Which is why the sea because when I think of home I think of a nice place by the seaside. So my house is not in the water but that's the waves because I think of the sea.

CH: Is that a picture of your house on the right.

S: Yeah. [laughs]

CH: Ohkay. It's got a long pathway leading into it, it's kind of interesting.

S: Yeah that's the feeling of it doesn't have. Like the road actually goes it's perpendiculari Lucia.

LR: Perpendicular.

S: Oh is it. Perpendicular it's not... well there is a road that's leads to it but there is a bigger road that's this way. It's just it felt like a long way home.

CH: Okay so the kind of pathway is representing a long way ok.

S: Yeah it always is a long way because it takes two flights minimum to get home. [chuckles] So it is always, or a very long long journey to Edinburgh and then a very long car journey from wherever airport you get so it's always a long way but it was... Endless then you know because its no way I'm thinking can I go there, there and there. It's just there was no way to home. No path.

LR: Did you think about going home then during that period?

S: Permanently or for that?

LR: For at least a little time for some time.

S: I'm pretty sure I did. I want to answer with a certainty the remembering thinking you know... I don't think... no because I don't remember thinking I could. I remember trying to plan to go to home as soon as possible which eventually I managed to do because I was there at the end of August. So as soon as it was ok, safe enough for us I booked. I must have booked in April or something like that. Actually I think it was April when I booked my trip to Italy for the end of summer but as soon as it hit I don't think I contemplated the possibility of going home. If I remember I actually the desperation came from the fact that I knew I could not if I wanted to. Actually I was certain, that's why I felt so lost and I missed home so much because I could not go if I wanted.

LR: Yes. That's right I think there was this sense of not being able to go. I think in theory. I mean I thin it's interesting because I don't remember either thinking about going home although I was quite scared at the beginning and apparently

it was because Italy was so bad at the beginning of the lockdown. Do you remember even before they brought out the lockdown here, Italy was already in the middle of a really dramatic sort of time you know when you saw those images on the television or you know on the internet in Bergamot and most of the north of Italy was really scary. I think in theory it would have been possible to go there then but in reality I think for me was also the thought of perhaps giving the virus to my mum who was so old. I don't know if you were thinking about that.

S: I think maybe I'm mistaken but I think I remember we couldn't. I remember there were flights from the government planned for Italians who needed to go back to Italy because there weren't flights flying to. So we couldn't go. Like Italy was in full lockdown so we couldn't just go because we wanted to so if you had... I mean I'm officially a resident abroad so I cannot say I'm going back home.

LR: Yeah, yeah the same here. You're probably right.

S: That longing from home the way I never felt before it was because I couldn't go.

LR: Yes.

S: Now I know I can always go so it's fine. I won't see them today, maybe not this month but I know I'll see them. I don't know. My dad's here now. I'm going home for Christmas.

LR: Yeah me too.

S: First time in nine years for me by the way so it's exceptional but you know I mean it happens eventually we see each other soon enough but then we couldn't and I remember that created this sense of desperation. I don't know when I could ever go home again you know. You know on the news you couldn't then but we didn't know when we could go and it felt as far as Australia you know. It felt so far away it was... I cannot swim through the channel so there was no way because it's what we call dark enormous space between me and my home you know what I mean. You know this stupid Island we're on you know there's no way around it you have to be either be accepted on a flight or you swim. [chuckles]

LR: Yeah. I was going to ask you one thing that I don't normally ask but I think in this case because you are you know an intellectual and because you are a psychologist I'm going to ask you this. Did that period change the perception of home for you, the very notion of home in your head?

S: I think I need you to explain a bit more when....

LR: So because I felt trapped and I really wanted to go home and I couldn't go home and you said in other times you know well I cant go tomorrow but I go next month and you know...

S: Oh ok I get it.

LR: You think about home in some sort of way.

S: Let's say I had debated for a long time. It's still not completely gone but whether it was worth going back to live there. Which I never really considered before. Like I said when I when I got back from Aberdeen I was never thinking about going back to Italy ever. I did consider it a few times over the last year or so. Kind of decided probably the UK is a better place to raise my children in. So I'm not going but it is there you know that tickling that you cannot take it for granted that you can go back when you want to and that's where my roots are, my family, my important people. Everybody is there.

LR: Yes. Does it sort of remind you of what it means? Home?

[long pause]

S: To remind me it means I had forgotten so no I guess.... No I think it created a bigger distance you know like before it was just like you know you look at the map and the world and I have one hanging there. UK is there, Italy is there, fairly short distance yeah. So it's not like China or whatever Canada you know, it's quick enough to get home and then is it really? If I were live in Germany or what if Russia, ok politics that would probably be a different problem but you know what I mean. Then you can just drive there, you can walk the bloody place you know if you were crazy enough but I cannot swim through the channel. [laughing] I think it made me more aware that where I'm at it can be, oh I'm on an Island, it doesn't feel like it but it is. So home is far and can be really far in a snap. They can make it so far that I can't get to it.

LR: So has your perception of Britain changed during the lockdown?

S: Yeah it got a bit smaller I think. Got a bit smaller, erm....

[long pause]

S: I don't think that Britain as a government caused me to feel caged. I think what happened is over that, you know above that but at the end of the day this is an Island and that creates an extra layer of troubles when something like a pandemic

comes or a war or who knows you know like something really big. That would be the same thing if something happened like you know if...*[fart noise indicating frustration]* I mean look at Brexit, you know countries still break up, they've not learnt. They still make major disagreements and look at the poor Turkish people just round the corner you know and it can go on and on. So I think I'm more aware that I'm more vulnerable in terms of my chances to do what I want in regards of getting home because I live on an island and I don't own a boat and it's.... Yeah it shrunk. Britain shrunk around me. It feels a bit more cagey and trapping.

LR: Ohkay.

CH: Is that your house in Aberdeen in the picture or is it somewhere else?

S: No it's no house. I mean I love my house in Aberdeen but the only, well not the only thing I miss when I go but I miss my house but I didn't even... It's not what keeps me here you know.

CH: But is the drawing, where's that? That house there that you drew?

S: That's Italy.

CH: Italy ok.

S: Yeah that's my house in Italy. That's on the other side of the big black dark thing.

LR: Of course.

CH: Yeah I see you've got windows in the top of the roof.

S: Yeah there's an attic flat.

CH: It's a what flat?

S: There's an attic.

CH: An attic as well. Ok. Are those question marks in red?

S: It's not it's half of my, sorry the other half of the heart.

CH: The other half of the heart ok. The heart ok. You're cut in half.

S: Yeah sorry for the bad but I don't know...

CH: No no and the red, that interesting shape that looks kind of like lips or something on you? What's that?

S: That's just a hole where my heart should sit hole. But it's actually ripped out and half here and half there.

CH: Ohkay.

LR: I think it's quite interesting that in your picture I mean it might be by chance but you don't have a mouth.

S: Huh. I don't know I felt like I was expressing enough how I felt with that. I'm really bad at drawing and it's not that I intentionally avoided because I thought it would look bad because I remember you said it doesn't matter I mean look at the house *[laughing]* you know I mean I guess it's bad enough and I still did it. It's just when I did draw the eye closed then it was enough expressing how I felt I guess so I just didn't feel it needed.

LR: I don't want to read too much into it but also the very fact that you didn't draw a mouth could you know be very meaningful in a way.

S: Well in hindsight. It was just there was nothing I could do. There was really nothing there I could, so I guess there was nothing I could say that would change things. Nothing I could physically, practically do.

LR: Yeah!

CH: Mmmhmm and you're the only person in the drawing as well.

S: Well my kids are...

LR: They're kids there.

CH: Oh your kids are at the bottom are they?

S: Sorry I just used a pencil.

LR: No but I could see them very well and I was actually going to ask you that to me looks like your kids are really hanging onto you and you've got this kind of protective aura. Protecting them?

S: Yes.

LR: So yeah I think that part of the picture is really interesting. The way in which you relate to your kids physically there.

S: I think it's because when you asked me to do this that side of the picture is what I immediately had and the rest came after thinking.

LR: Ok that's interesting.

S: Yeah so that is what best picture how I felt and then I can explain why with the other two third if that makes sense.

LR/CH: Yes.

S: Like giving you the middle bit and the confusion and the coldness and the darkness and all the bla bla bla and what the hells going on and then home is on the other side. That's half of me you know [voice breaking] and I'm getting emotional again [sigh].

LR: Yes.

S: But this bit, I also agree. I agree that's most representative because that same image I had. The first thing I thought when you asked me to do this.

LR: Yes. It shows. I think it really shows and I think it's so dense of meaning I think that part of the picture. I mean I notice a lot of things I mean I don't know if I should be saying but I think it's really significant I mean the kids are just looking to you, onto you and you are looking down to them. You said I've got my eyes shut but you know when I first saw the picture it looked like, it could be shut but they could also look down to your kids like you know and so your eyes are looking down to your kids to protect them and to you know keep them near you but your arm is like reaching out back to Italy. I think it's really so expressive.

S: I felt everything you said I think I tried to represent with me putting my hand on my sons head.

LR: Yes!

S: I think my eyes closed is about the resignation. The impotence, there's nothing I can do you know there's just [scofs-annoyed/frustrated] you're just taken this. There's just nothing you can do, it's just happening to me and to us you know.

LR: I do and this probably you know I think this picture is great because I think probably by chance but maybe because of what I put.

CH: It's not by change!

LR: Yeah but it maybe because what I put in the art bag that I sent to you which was totally random I was making art packs more or less random but I think the image with the part in the middle has got europe's colours? European flag colours?

S: Oh I didn't realise that!

LR: I don't know.

S: Wow that's interesting. I didn't think of that but I think I wanted to be big and bold so that it was obvious that there was no crossing it and no beating it, no getting through it in any way but yeah. [laughing] Actually it's true.

CH: What is the yellow, because you put yellow around it.

S: Yes I just, it's again. Forgive me because I know you are the expert here. I know nothing about art, I was trying to place the movement because physically represent the channel but then with the form it kind of represents more things and I just thought if I just chuck three blue things it will be very static but if I put some yellow here and there it will create some movement like the waves or whatever so.

CH: Is that the sea right by your house in Italy?

LR: I think so.

CH: The blue, the turquoise?

S: Oh that was because there's a much nicer colour sea.

CH: There's what?

S: That's it. That's the warm and inviting Mediterranean piece of the sea. It's not this blue dark thing. Yeah I didn't make the waves of the Mediterranean sea on the other side.

CH: Can we ask you how you felt during the Brexit referendum or were you here at that time?

S: Yes I was. So I was raised by an English woman. I have a mom, but my mum was working, my dad was working and I had a full time nanny. I spent endless amount of hours with her and I love English people because I learnt to love English people through her right, she's English. I spent a lot of time in London throughout my life since I was five because of her and because of me you know falling in love with the place and wanting to go back again and back again. I accidentally happened to be in Aberdeen, I was moving to London so that's another story and then I realise fucking racist bastards. That's what I thought, the English are. I mean look at this stupid voting map like ffff... This is recording and I shouldn't swear so much but I felt like swearing like it's very genuine fucking what have you done? [*angry*] I remember I think I put it on Facebook, what have you done England. What have you done. What is this crazy thing. Seriously man?! [*heightened voice frustrated and angry*] And then the next day the most google thing search, thing googled was what's the EU. Are you kidding me?! The next day?! Oh my god like I'm still pissed off because I am planning to move to England but it's really not an emotional choice 'cause I would never leave Scotland if it were to be an emotional choice. I'm going to England because rationally, not that I have a plan, but have a strong intention to do that because rationally there's benefits for me to do so and for my children but emotionally I'm already thinking [*sigh*] you know when I think of it it's like [*sigh*]. Brexit basically I think of Brexit a lot and [*sigh*] you know there's a fear of rejection for being a foreigner, there is you know the Scottish government is so sweet. I remember having this letter through the box and like we love you foreigners, thank you for being here, we value you and we want to keep you close so don't feel like we want anything bad happening to you or something like that. Not with these exact words but that was the meaning of that, it was so nice that. They didn't have to do it. Thank you for doing it, I kept it, it's somewhere here. It was really nice but I did feel that, I didn't need that. I felt welcome since I first moved here. I didn't need that and I didn't need that because I seen the map of how people voted so I knew that Scotland was happy to keep sharing with the Europeans you know that makes sense and then that idiot made a bus to say millions of pounds to NHS you know [*sigh*]. Anyway I'm getting... I think I can still feel myself being angry by talking about it you know. Idiots, racist idiots. You know there's, I laugh at the memes that are like ohh your surgery went well, that's so many million pounds back. It's good that I'm right isn't it, you know the doctor talking to the patient because that's the bottom of it. I think it felt... I felt unwanted by the English people.

LR: Are you not a bit scared of that if you go back to England? Are you not feared that you might feel unwelcome?

S: Yes. Fear is probably a big word I realise as a general feeling they like foreigners less than Scottish people ok. I think they made it very clear but I don't ... I'm hoping that when I move, wherever I think I will be moving, I have a big city in mind, not London but I will be looking to live in a place like I live here now so like Grandholm is like a community within Bridge of Don which is a community within Aberdeen. It's my kind of place, so I hope, what you need really is to be happy with your neighbours at the end of the day you know. [*pfft/sigh*] There is the good and the bad people everywhere so I don't think I generally think a single English person is not nice. I think they're probably a lot nice, it's just as a whole you know I'm Italian so. I'm Italian from Liguria which is at with the borders of France now if you come from Ventimiglia which is the very city at the border with French you get along with French people but if you get a few miles in, then we don't like each other. It's just a fact, you don't need a reason for it, it's a culture, it's a habit, it goes back generations. Like my dad could tell you that it was already there and probably there before him because you're two, you're not close enough to know one another and to appreciate one another but your close enough to feel the fear and the differences and you know, you move to the next region they don't even think about the French. So when I think of the French as a whole I think they're like, if you take one nice, if you put two or more together, troubles because they're so closed and nationalist and bla bla bla. It might be completely bullshit because I don't really know many of them you know what I mean. So I have this sense of the English people being unwelcoming of foreigners but I also know in reality they're just people and you know you get to know people so I do have it in my mind. I do have it but that's not what's going to stop me from moving if I think that's the best choice for my family.

LR: Of course. Of course yeah.

CH: Did you apply for the settlement scheme.

S: I have yes. I've settled.

CH: You've settled. What does that word mean settled?

S: [*sigh*] Well. Except the fact that I got my second passport very quickly when for the first one I had to demonstrate four or five generation of British nationality to get a non-British passport. Not much because they could decide to take it away any minute. I think the fact that my kids are British and that I own my house and bla bla bla it makes me more safer to not being kicked out than that piece of paper.

LR: Which is not even a real piece of paper.

S: No it's a code.

LR: They didn't give us any unfortunately which would be... Don't you think even that?

S: Oh I gave feedback, I've been interviewed by the government about it. About a year or so ago and I said yeah that's bullshit. [laughing]

LR: It is.

S: It's really disempowering you from. Yes I gave that feedback as well.

LR: Totally and do you think this kind of arrangement will make travel more difficult backward and forward from Italy. I mean do you think that as well as the covid restrictions there's some more troubles or problems because of Brexit?

S: Well yes. For instance everybody has to get a passport now. I had to run get my kids an Italian ID card because we just travelled with a British passport before nobody question it. It's been twice now, so last year and this year but this year I got prepared. So this year when I landed I've got an appointment to get their card done so they kind of let me get away with it and they checked again when I left and I was like I've got ED I've got ED! So they were satisfied but they never bother to ask me about Italian documents before. So I really had to stress to get their ID's done when I was there and my family, well my mum and dad always had a passport but my friends, now when they think about coming to see me they run to get a passport because it's technically harder. So the biggest problem for me it's having an au pair because before any European person could within the age range could be an au pair and now they can't. Nobody can and this has been a massive problem just not for my family, couple of naturals in close families, it's a massive problem because childcare is incredibly expensive right. So say for instance when I start back teaching in January, I have a girl here now but I won't have her in January anymore. So that's going to cost me in childcare what I earn.

LR: Gosh. So you're trying to get a new au pair or?

S: I can't. It's not legal anymore. Either you find someone with a settled or pre-settled status but their far and few and there's less and less because eventually they go back home and I cannot get one anymore or you get an English girl who wants to come to Scotland. Where is the cultural exchange? Where is the language exchange you know it's just... Now they're even saying they're going to make it even more illegal even for locals because it's potentially underpaid work.

LR: Ohkay.

S: It cost a kidney but if you ask me but still less than nursery hours. So that's my biggest trouble with Brexit has been my family are infants really. I mean I had this girl for months it was beautiful, it was part of the family and it worked very well and I was happy, she was happy, my kids were happy and then she went back and I found another and it was nearly impossible. It took me five months to stay here ten and a half months. It's really challenging as a single mum with no family to navigate work and studies and caring for my kids and paying everything for them. It's really hard. So Brexit has really created a challenge for me as a mother more than for me as an individual because I'm losing myself I'm sorting stuff.

CH: Can I ask you another question.

S: Yes of course.

CH: It sounds like an of question but do you speak Italian to your children?

S: Moreso now, yes because I didn't used to a lot. So my ex was abusive so it was showing racism towards my oldest who could understand him and all this racism towards me so I was not really speaking a lot of Italian in the house but since he's moved out I speak more and more Italian to my kids. Also my oldest now is four, just turned four, understand nearly everything I say. Well we still speak English most of the time. The youngest one will find even easier because he heard it from very very early age.

LR: Of course. Did your parents speak English so they can communicate with the? No.

S: My mum some bits but my mum was in her sixties and she studied at school so, I don't know how long ago and my dad studied French at school so he's been doing duolingo for the last year maybe now but really I think it's a bit of a age barrier and my mother is very shy. So it doesn't really... even when I think he knows more than he express cause he's been studying it and is very switched on and clever so I'm sure he's learnt quite a lot with this duolingo app for the last few months but he just doesn't dare. I think he could communicate with his grandchildren a little bit you know, get some basics, getting around things done or asking them what they want. It's fine, they'll learn Italian.

LR: Yeah I'm sure. Yeah expose to it and they'll learn it. They already know it probably.

S: Yeah I think so. I have a decoder for the Italian TV, I bought it after my son was born because for years I don't miss Italian TV I think it's pretty rubbish but I don't have really watch TV either I don't even have an arial I don't, I stopped paying the TV tax because at the end of the day because I only watch some TV series every now and then if I ever have the time but really

don't watch TV. So I bought this decoder to allow my sons to watch Italian cartoons because I thought that would be an incentive for them to learn Italian. So they get both languages, they get English cartoons and Italian cartoons.

LR: That was really the opposite with my son when he was a small child and I was living in Italy I used to get him these DVD's at the time. DVD's in English and all the films in English like Peter Pan and what have you. You know the classics. I don't know how many times he watched each one of them like I don't know a hundred times. You know how children keep on watching the same stuff.

S: I think I watched the coco boy you know half of coco melon so yes.

CH: Can I ask you another question sorry. I need to go back to this drawing you did of yourself because the image of the hole you made for your heart. That, you know when someone draws a hole they usually draw a circle, your hole is not a circle or anything like that. It's like a shape I've never seen.

S: Oh, I wouldn't have done it any other way. I don't know I think because it's been pulled out. You know I think if it's been pushed from the inside it would have come out as a hole but because it's been pulled out then it's not such a nice circle, clean shape.

LR: That's great.

CH: It's geometric though.

S: Ok urmm.... I pictured like this. (gestures)

LR: Ripping it out.

S: Yeah so it's just a representation of the ripping out. Geometric but yep it look like it.

CH: OK.

S: I don't know I didn't think much more of that. You know when you think you open your ribcage to get a heart out it doesn't look round. I think there's an underlying knowledge of anatomy in me that made it look like that. It's probably that you know, having a picture of how...

CH: Have you studied anatomy?

S: I did study a bit of pharmacy. Well I studied quite a lot of pharmacy but I didn't graduate. I got depression instead of a degree in the last year. So I have an idea of what it will look like inside.

CH: Ok interesting.

LR: No that part of the drawing is really full of meaning. It's really dense of meanings I think. Really interesting. I don't know I think I don't have anymore questions. Do you Charlie?

CH: No. I think the drawing's amazing.

LR: I know, so do I.

S: Really [laughing] can you see the surprise in my face. Oh ok, thank you.

CH: Were these blue circles where they, did Lucia give them to you in the pouch.

S: Yes. I think I would have gone blue probably, dark blue with pencils or something.

LR: There's only one more thing that I can think of that's related to the drawing. So on the Italian part let's say that you draw a house it means your home and it gives you this sense of protected and being cuddled and yeah it's very clear. On the left hand part of the picture, you're there with your kids and you are not in any kind of enclosed atmosphere or enclosed setting. Does that mean anything?

S: Well this is not home. I have a beautiful house that I deeply love and I'll miss terribly for the building itself, for what it is sitting, with surrounding of it and the community feeling. I'll miss this house terribly but it's not home. I never felt at home in Aberdeen and I've been trying for years. It's just not home. So there is no representation of home and I did think for a minute should I draw family members and friends on the right side because I had space and I was like nah that's a house and everybody's in it. Emotionally when I think about going home, everything else in that thought. Everybody else is in that thought. So yeah no I know because there's The nicest thing that makes me feel at home here is that I live by the river and by the forest and that really gives me a sense of peace and calm and I love walking along the river in the nicer season so I could have drawn a river but it just didn't even come to mind because it this all I have a home. Me and my kids and my cat and my dog but they weren't... [laughing]

CH: I mean I got one more question. You know the way you felt during Covid you felt distraught. Is there a word in Italian that would sum that mood up?

[long pause]

S: I can think of one, I will need to check with Lucia because I don't think it's strong enough. I think it points to the main. So the word is malinconia but in a very deep way, deeply felt malinconia. So melancholy really, but I think it's got a different shade, a different accent in English that it has in Italian.

LR: I think so too. I don't think...

S: It's not a direct translation of malinconia.

LR: The way you said, the way you described your feelings before I think for me, if I had to sort of think of a correspondence in Italian, yeah but mainconia is one but I would probably add an adjective which would be lacerante.

S: Oh si. Si perfect.

LR: Does this make sense?

S: Spot on.

LR: Yeah because I still express much better in Italian than in English. I think I'm too old now to get in the same master of language in English as I have in Italian and I think I have to give it up and that is a constant source of frustration for me because I think it's so great to have the mastery of a language when you need to express yourself and I still feel like I will never get to this same level in English.

S: Can I try to make you feel better? We come from a much richer language.

LR: You reckon? I don't know.

S: Gosh, million years old language. English is very young in comparison and I think our vocabulary, I feel our vocabulary is much wider like there's so many more words. I think I mentioned I'm going to write a thesis on counselling and bilingualism so there is an element of people cannot express what they want in English because the word just isn't there. Not just for Italian it's from other languages as well. There isn't a word for it so you're better expressing yourself in Italian because you can express yourself better in Italian.

LR: I hope so and I hope I will still improve but you know it's a source of constant frustration. You know I don't know how many times I tried to read Virginia Woolf in English. Mrs Dalloway, I can't. I don't understand it.

S: Oh gosh I'll have to send out for it in a year's time when I get some time of my life back for like reading for enjoyment and not just for work or studies. I might just try and read that one and give you feedback.

LR: Oh it is really tough. It's really really tough indeed. There was one more thing that oh yeah. I was going to ask you that you didn't draw any house or anything around the picture on the left and you said Aberdeen is not home. Last thing, is it Aberdeen or is it non-Italy which is not home?

S: Hmm... I ... hmm.... Hard to say because I never lived long enough. Sorry I've been a few months in Belgium, doesn't really count I think. I've never been long enough somewhere else to make a comparison. I know that I happen to come here and then I got stuck here when I thought was temporary and then I tried to leave and something else kept me here and then I tried to leave and something kept me here. That's three times in a row, so I think have this sense with Aberdeen because I felt like I've never really truly chosen it and [sigh] there's something subconscious about it like everywhere else I've been before for holiday or forever I in five minutes I know where I am. I can look at a map I can find myself I can go back to my...I'm still really, I use the GPS to go most places in Aberdeen.

LR: Me too!

S: And I just, my mind refuses to take in the layout of this City. It's just, it's frustrating in a way but I can't learn it. I just don't want to know it. I just subconsciously because of course I would like to know it so it sort of got the most travel routes of course I do know them but I don't know. It happened this week at work and he said ohh, a new colleague, and where you living? I live there and my other colleague oh I live there too and I'm like what the hell is that now? I just can't place things in Aberdeen I just... Nine years and half now it's been and I don't have a clue so I think it's Aberdeen that doesn't really feel like home but I think there's other reason other than Brexit or Covid. It's just very personal I can't, I can't feel at home.

CH: Do you see yourself, I know this is a weird question but do you see yourself as European or British or Italian or Scottish or English?

S: Well I'm sure I'm Italian. When I was in Italian I didn't feel I was Italian much so that tells you something. I am six foot tall, blonde, just dyed my hair. I look nothing like an Italian woman really. I feel nothing like it. From pre-school age I was fluent in two languages, really did.... I knew when I was twelve that I wanted to live abroad when old enough. In my teenage dreams I was marrying a foreign man [chuckles]. I married an Italian guy in Scotland eventually. So I never felt Italian much but now that I'm out of Italy I can feel the Italian in me and there's so many good things about being Italian so I'm proud of being Italian. I think I'm British in a way, now I'm allergic to think English because bloody racist and because I've learnt to love Scotland and Scottish people much and I no longer sound like the queen. I think I should a lot more like a local fisherman so when I speak. My accent is terribly dramatically changed over the years so that part of me feels British but I always have because I grew up playing snake on ladders and singing que sera sera and you know like, there's so... I was brought up with part of this culture. There's things that are not new to me and I would sing oranges and lemons and I still sing it to my kids, like the old fashioned nursery rhymes because I knew it from when I was a child you know what I mean. So there is part of me that has always felt a little bit British. I wouldn't... Today I wouldn't say English or Scottish I would say British and I know the Scottish are allergic to hear they are British but they are. Like yourself I'm Irish I'm not British, yes but you are you know. You might not like the idea of it but there is a common culture. It's like Italians are so different you know from a place to the other but there is common culture eventually. So I feel strong about my kids being half Italian. I think they should be proud of being half Scottish and I think they should be proud of being half Italian definitely.

LR: Yeah, I was really a bit cross when my son was doing Italian and Politics in Edinburgh for two years and now he decided to just go into Politics and I mean I didn't try to stop him but to myself I was thinking hmm that's a bit of a shame because he's loosing part of his... I think he'll always be half and half because he was in Italy until he was about 13 years old so you know he speaks Italian like us and it completely switches from one to the other without and your kids will be the same I'm sure.

S: I don't know see when I was little, three four year old like my oldest is. I would speak English like an English child and then I would speak Italian like an Italian child. My son speaks Italian with an English accent.

LR: Yeah but if he stayed in Italy. My son when we first came here he had an Italian accent.

S: I was in Italy but I did speak English like an English child. So I don't understand why is it different cause up to when I was thirty, thirty one in London. One person out of twenty would eventually go like are you a foreigner. Nobody could guess I was Italian, no one but most people wouldn't know I wasn't English because I had this perfect accent. [laughing] I was in Italy when I spoke like that. You know I learned in Italy. My son speaks Italian with an English accent. It's super weird. So I was expecting him to speak Italian like I do you know what I mean but he doesn't. It's fair enough, I don't mind.

LR: I mean I think my son doesn't have an Italian accent anymore but Charlie do you think James has got an Italian accent?

CH: Urm... no he has more of a Scottish accent.

LR: Yeah he picked it up yeah. He totally picked it up so I don't know but you are the expert with studying bilingual.

S: No no I'm not an expert. Well hopefully I will know a bit but everything but an expert. There is a few people in Aberdeen that actually looked into the lingualism and counselling but not just. I find really interesting to listen to, they're so much... There's a world out there and gosh couldn't I not you know get lost in the literature about the bilingual brain and everything. It's so interesting. [laugh]

LR: It's fascinating yeah.

S: Absolutely fascinating. I could waste a lot of time just by clicking and clicking and clicking but I'm not doing because I don't have a lot. Definitely not an expert.

LR: You will be because you told me you're studying in a PHD or a masters.

S: No it's just a masters degree I'm doing. I'm too old I think to embark on a PHD.

LR: Oh I don't know Charlie's thinking about it.

CH: Yeah.

S: Well it's not just an age thing. When I say that it's because I know for a fact, knowing myself and how much I'm enjoying this that if I was twenty or twenty five or even thirty I would definitely go for it. I would not stopped in here because I'm too curious, too interested, too excited about what I'm doing I would probably get gone but because I am forty and I have two very little children I'm here on my own again, no family, no one. Alone in a very strong way, I just can't. So that's what I meant by younger it's not just an age thing but a younger situation you know like younger personal life when you're only responsible basically for yourself nothing will stop me. I will definitely go for research like it's just too cool.

LR: I know and it's cool doing research.

S: Yeah, it's really fun. I've got dysgraphia so writing it, I'm going to tell you how did that go because composing and, it's hard. It's challenging so I might not enjoy that part a lot but the learning the understanding, oh that's just too much fun. Go for it Charlie honestly. It is fantastic, if you're in any doubt just definitely go for it. There's nothing not to love.

LR: Yeah, anyway. We don't want to take too much up of your time.

S: Yeah I think my kid has been up for a bit now.

LR: I think it was great, thank you so much.

S: Did I give you what you needed?

LR: Oh! Loads!

S: Ok, that's important because I didn't really know what you were looking for I hope you're not too far from.

LR: Yeah we're still trying to find more participants but we've got a few and let's see how it goes so I think we'll still be interviewing for another month or so and then we'll start analysing so.

CH: Yeah if you know anyone in London, give us a shout.

Conversation continues around general things and finding more people for interviews.

End of transcript