

Interview: Ilma

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Anke Maas-Lowit: AML

Ilma

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.

PLEASE NOTE: Some words are missing as the audio quality was very poor due to high noise output from the interviewee's microphone and interviewee is speaking very quietly. They are highlighted in red and written as ???.

CH: Ok we're recording. So Lucia, can everybody go close to their computers so we can hear you well sorry?

LR: Yeah but Charlie I can hear you well but I can't see your face, I can just see the north face logo on your coat, that's about it. I don't know if you've had a contract with them for advertising or something but that's the most prominent thing I can see.

CH: Ok let's get cracking then. Lucia if you want to share Ima's piece of work?

LR: Yes I am doing it now. Ok? I must say I was looking at it just now, well I looked at it before but I was really looking at it now and gosh you really have to explain Ima, it's really intriguing so please.

I: Actually I was just recording what came up at that moment what I was drawing. I didn't think about it before. I started with a face of the bunny but I didn't think it's going to be a bunny when I started drawing it but then I started to think about the emotions that were when the pandemic hit and I had the conversations at that time with my best friend who was then in Nigeria doing some translation work there. She was overworked and very tired and very emotional and she said oh I feel like a ragdoll rabbit just chucked in the corner with long arms and long legs and very sad and I was like that's exactly how I feel so that's why that rabbit came up and then obviously all the thoughts that are in the head that you are somewhere in Latvia with your friends and your family and then those flowers I was then painting that. In Latvian culture they represent, the blue colour represents hope or longing, and there is even one poet who lived more than a hundred years ago and he wanted to be buried in a blue coffin just because it symbolised the hope and that's why there's blue flowers.

LR: You mean the blue flowers in the cloud?

I: Yeah, like hoping to meet those people you love as soon as possible and obviously in the pandemic it wasn't possible, you just sit at home like you are in a cage and all you can do is think. It wasn't very fun.

LR: *The person or the rabbit looks really sad.*

I: Yeah. It is. That's how it looks like, its because it's a really sad time.

LR *You felt sad?*

I: Very sad yeah, especially because the first bit of the pandemic was like kind of fine because both me and my husband we were on furlough and we had a small kid and it was like amazing, we can just be at home and some pays for that? Amazing! But then the first lockdown ended and we managed to go to Latvia for three weeks and then we realised how much we missed those people that are our people and just stay with friends and then coming back to that and then having another lockdown, pfft... Then that was really really hard to just understand that we can't go there at any time we want anymore and communication with friends is just getting very very difficult because who wants to talk on zoom all the time, no one. It's not only them, it's also us who feels so alone all the time. You just don't want to talk about those emotions and be sad with your friends and they feel the same so it's just you feel trapped in your own thoughts and emotions and yeah.

LR: *So this refers mostly to the second lockdown you were feeling so bad. So make sure it was the fall and winter of 2020 after the summer, something like that?*

I: Yeah so it started end of 2020, beginning of 2021.

LR: *Yeah the autumn and winter yeah, when you came back from your holidays. Yeah that was really tough because we didn't even have a vaccine.*

I: Yeah. The first lockdown you think oh it's going to end soon so it's fine now it's oh you can just sit at home. Then this realisation that, well it might never end for the rest of our lives.

LR: *Yeah, very much so. Can I ask why the rabbit or the person has such long arms?*

I: Because as I explained earlier with my friend we were talking about how we feel, you know this feeling like (*sound of movement*), and you have big long arms and you grow and you have big long legs and you don't want to do anything. That's why it's my drawing.

CH: *So is that water around you?*

I: Yeah from tears.

LR: *Gosh!*

CH: *And the rubber duck?*

I: That's because obviously we have a small child and you have to play with your kids and the rubber duck symbolises that you still have to do all these things even though you don't want to and you don't feel like having fun with kids and yeah you have to do it.

CH: *Is that a pair of lungs at the top?*

I: No that's a heart, broken a little bit.

LR: *Did you say that it's water, why did you put water in the picture?*

I: No those are tears.

LR: Oh tears! Ok, alright.

I: There were a lot of those.

LR: Very expressive, yes an the fact that the rubber duck is on your tears, is something quite meaningful. You have to sort of put your fears behind or like put on a good face or a smiley face for your son I suppose but a bed of tears.

I: Well you feel like crap. You feel really bad and you feel sad but then that little person doesn't really care that you're sad.

LR: How old was he then?

I: He is now two and a half so basically he was just turned one when all the pandemic started so that's the age where you kind of would like to go out and he needs to explore but you are just sitting inside.

CH: You've got really big eyes as well.

I: Well... I have big eyes.

CH: You have big eyes, ok. No it's interesting. Is it like a puppet because you've got like a bit of a top and sort of like a circus tent or something?

I: Ah that's a cage, like trapped in a cage and it's kind of well a golden cage because comparing to others we were in a very good situation like we could be at home with our kid but at the same time you feel like you are trapped and it's not the best situation because we can't do anything and no ones around and yeah... Golden cage.

AML: Can I ask what the stars are? You know you've got stars all around your cage.

I: Yeah like maybe the feeling that there is life out there, like others are maybe able to meet their friends in the park but as we are here and we don't have friends here that wasn't even an option. You just go out and be alone, like those who live here and they have friends and family they could at least meet as soon as it was allowed and we didn't have that choice. You know there is life out there that others can enjoy but because of our situation we just didn't.

AML: So that sounds like you know the Covid situation, the lockdown that it actually made you maybe more aware of a sense of isolation?

I: Yeah defiantly. Before that I didn't think about it because living here was our choice and we knew that we could whatever we want, we move back to London a little bit we will do that but then when you are like trapped and you can't make these decisions anymore then you understand well... you just want to be somewhere else.

LR: So you said your mood changed when you went back so I gather you went back to Latvia in the summer of 2020 and then you came back to Edinburgh and that's when your mood really became kind of blue.

I: Yeah because I have realised that I don't want to be here alone without friends but the going back, you can't do it in a second. It's just such a long period of time. You need to find a new job there, you can't really move before you make everything right there so it's more you think about things you

want to do and you realise you're in a situation you don't want to be anymore but you can't really change it straight away because in your head you're somewhere else already.

LR: So was it Covid that made you change your mind about being here?

I: Yeah because previously, not only Covid. I think for me I think it started when my kid was born and then I started but then my husband wasn't really into that thought. He didn't want to move back but then, after Covid and the pandemic he started to think yeah that's the right thing to do because at least we're not alone. We need our friends and we have this choice.

AML: I was just wondering, you've said a lot about Covid has really affected your thinking and the choices that you're going to make. You were here since Brexit, did you also feel affected by Brexit?

I: Not really because we all have citizenship here as well so we have double citizenship so in that sense it didn't really matter. The only thing it was just annoying that for example to send parcel to our friends on birthdays. Now it's so much more difficult because they need to go to the post office, they need to pay for it and it's just all these little things that you can't do freely anymore but in a bigger sense no it didn't affect us in that way. If we didn't have citizenship then it would be more of an issue because in that case we couldn't really make the decision to move back because if you don't have your citizenship then it's not as easy to come back in case something goes wrong there. At least now we have this option.

LR: So when did you make the decision to take British citizenship?

I: It was a plan as soon as the six years passed after I came to the UK I started to save the money and then do the exam and all the things you need to do and obviously my son straight away got a citizenship and my husband just this year and he also did the same process with the exam and English exam and things like that. It was always the thinking if we're here for such a long time it's just an obvious choice to do if we can have two passports.

CH: What did you feel about taking the exam? Was that frustrating or unnecessary?

I: No because you can't just have citizenship for nothing right and I took it as a normal thing to do. Maybe the fees could be less but then again if you want it you pay right? It's a choice. You don't need that but I didn't have that problem. I think the English exam...

AML: What about the things that you were asked for the citizenship test. You know, remember the booklet and the different themes. I'm just interested to hear what you thought about them, if they were meaningful in respect of taking on citizenship.

I: I think yeah because for me at least I was kind of forced to read through all the history and understand things which was in some parts boring but in some parts very interesting just to know things that otherwise I would never have a chance to know. Like the culture and history and stuff and I took the studying thing very seriously so the exam took me what two minutes, maybe not even more. So it was just click click click click all done and everything's fine so.

CH: Very good.

LR: I'm curious about something you said just before that we started feeling sad because we couldn't go out and see our friends and... is that because in Latvia when you went it was possible to see friends so they didn't have the restrictions that we had here?

I: We had to stay in isolation for two weeks but we were like in the small city and then we obviously could meet our friends outside and it wasn't that strict and as soon as those two weeks ended, one

week we could do whatever we want and they didn't have so many rules. Now when we went in November just for a couple of weeks, then they had stricter rules because of the vaccination. If you didn't have a vaccination pass then you couldn't go into shops but we did obviously so for us it wasn't a big deal.

LR: So it was a different situation in 2020 ok.

I: Because in Latvia I think it was one of the lowest rates of infections and then it went up afterwards but that time in between that was two lockdowns. It was normal. It didn't compare to in Scotland at all.

LR: Yes.

CH: I love your drawing so much. Your drawing which is fantastic, there's green in the speech bubble at the top, the kind of dream or whatever to get back to Latvia. You see below you're really sad, so it's kind of like a heaven and hell thing?

I: Well green is life right?

CH: Green is life yeah.

I: Life there and the country is green as well so. For me it has associations with you just go out in nature. Forests, everything you just feel free.

LR: Anything that is not very green is not good for you? It's not green enough.

I: Not green enough. I mean obviously there's green when you go out from Edinburgh but you had restrictions, you can't travel.

LR: Yeah I suppose there would be some in Latvia now, restrictions but if you're out in nature of course it's different so yeah. If you probably if you were not in a city, even in Scotland if you are in a rural place you can just go out and see nature but I realise if you're in the city it's a very different situation.

CH: I'm interested as well Ima, you spoke about your cage being golden so did you kind of see other people who didn't have golden cages or more or less privileged?

I: No I think it was golden only because here we were, the money situation was much better than for other people who lost their jobs and it's just not a very good situation to be in but at the same time if you don't compare it to other people and the money thing doesn't change the emotion. You still feel like you are alone. In that you are not desperate but you don't feel good as well.

LR: It's interesting this feeling of loneliness. Was that brought about by Covid or was that foregrounded by Covid?

I: Hmm... I think everything together because that loneliness feeling started way before because of the small kid with no help around and obviously you feel alone and then lockdown on top of that so it was like extra things.

LR: So you were saying it was you feeling like that before and then your husband kind of joined in.

I: I think that came as a little bit different, he doesn't see things in that way as I see but we all have different point of views. It was just when we saw our friends and yeah he started to feel the same that he would like to have more company, more people, more close relatives around.

LR: Yeah, I understand.

CH: So this whole thing of home is really important for you.

I: Yeah and I think I didn't realise that before. How much I need the feeling that you are home. Before that we were travelling together with my husband and we lived in London and everything was like oh we can do this and we can do that and now with the kid I started to feel like I wanted to feel like home and I don't feel like home here and at least there you have people that makes this feeling like you feel at home. It wasn't like... before Covid I can't say that it was very important to me but then now it's really I want to feel grounded.

LR: Do you think it would be different in London or is it about the UK or is it just about not being in Latvia?

I: It's difficult to compare because when we were in London we didn't have a kid and then the life was so different and we could do whatever we want and then here, first of all there are less things to do. In London you go out and you take the same route and you see different things every day. Here you go out and it's the same thing every day and one of the reasons we moved to Edinburgh because of Fringe. All this culture and all of the things and then that stopped as well. There was just other things that was wrong time for the move or...

LR: Oh gosh, but were you not in Edinburgh before it all started, the Covid? Had you been in Edinburgh a little bit earlier?

I: We came to Edinburgh then for the first year obviously we explored, we went to Pentland Hills, that's our favourite place here and then first year yah Fringe bla bla bla then kid came along and first year you are stuck at home and then the Covid started. So we kind of got to explore a little bit and then everything stopped.

LR: Yes of course. I mean it's been a blow for everything. Can I ask do you work in the arts because you seem to be very focused on the fringe and the culture scene in London compared to Edinburgh so can I ask if you work in the culture sector?

I: Unfortunately no. I have a Bachelor in arts but in culture theory and analysis. That's what I finished back in Latvia but I've never worked in the field which is also one thing because I was working for the sailing industry for nine years and obviously feeling that it's just not my thing with your kind of stuff. There's good things that came with the job and then yeah I left my job six months ago, also realising it's not for me and I need to change things and yeah.

LR: It sounds like you're really at a turning point in your life somehow.

I: Absolutely yeah, in many ways.

LR: Yes, and maybe Covid just triggered that. Is it also that being in a lockdown gave you some more time to reflect?

I: Definitely yeah. I realised I don't want to be back in that rat race I was in. I had time to stop and think and to understand I'm not happy in a way I feel now. So I need to do big changes to get out of it and if not for the Covid then this thing that you need to put your child in a nursery at nine months, it's just stupid and I don't get it. How can you just leave your small child at such an early age. In Latvia you have one and a half year you can sit at home and here for me it was just heart-breaking that I need to return to work before Covid started. At nine months! It's just... how do you do that?! Then for us it was great that Covid started because everything stopped and we could just take our

child out of our nursery and just be at home. There are plus and minuses but if you are looking at the whole situation then it worked out really good even though it as a really sad time but then at the same time you can't reflect on your life and understand what you want to do and what you don't want to do.

LR: Yeah, absolutely. I do understand.

CH: Can I ask a question is that ok? Yeah I'm interested as well that move from London. Did you feel as if you were more European or more aware of your Latvian heritage when you were in London or in Edinburgh.

I: London is a totally different world. You don't care where you come from because there's so many different nationalities and in every job you do, there's so many different people. You work with so many different people that you just don't care. I think it was the first time since I actually moved to the UK that I felt that I'm from somewhere else and I never felt that before. It's so weird because you get used to that because in London no one cares where you come from and here you kind of... They say they don't care but you can feel that you are not like really like in...

LR: Ok. So that's interesting, so did you think being European matters more in a negative sense in Edinburgh than in London?

I: I think so. You feel like you're an outsider here. Even though everything is friendly and... but it's not like. You can't feel like it's from heart.

LR: Interesting. That's really interesting.

AML: That's what I thought as well. People always say that Scotland is not-racist and you know it's all welcoming but it's not. There's always a barrier isn't there.

I: Yes and that's also one of the reasons why we are thinking of moving because I'm not sure I want my son to go to school here because of this. Because I don't know how to handle this. Like also all the drugs that are around here. I think I would feel safer in London because of the environment of such an openness than here. If you are different in the sense that you weren't born here but yeah I don't know if I would know how to react with some things. Like for him growing up if he would be in some sort of conflict situation. I would know how to react in Latvia because I was in the situation when I was growing up right but here you don't really know the rules.

LR: Ok. That's interesting. Have you ever lived in any other part of England apart from London?

I: When we moved we lived near (Hemel Hamstead) that was like an hour drive from London but that was like for one and a half years. There I didn't feel that different because that place was quite isolated and for us it was so new, everything was like whoa! We can do this, we can do that. We didn't think about it and yeah, then we moved to London and then it was a different story.

LR: Ok that's very interesting. So do you come from a big city Latvia?

I: Yeah from capital, from Riga.

LR: Do you think it's got something to do with your feeling a bit I don't know, not comfortable because Edinburgh is a capital city but it's not really a big city is it. Well if you compare it to London at least anyway.

I: If you compare to London then yeah but if you compare to Riga, I think it's the same size. There are probably more people than in Riga.

LR: So this feeling of discomfort that you can feel in Edinburgh because to a certain extent you're saying well Edinburgh is somehow parochial because it doesn't really accept all the differences and the diversity that London does.

I: I think the situation would be different if we didn't have a kid and then the Covid situation because if you are working in an environment and start to know people and then you start to know more people then maybe that will be different but in our situation it was just... Not very good ground for starting to know more people so I don't know how it will be in a normal situation without a kid and without Covid so I'll say that.

LR: Hmm, alright. Interesting. Charlie or Anke jump in by all means.

CH: OK.

AML: I can't think of anything else.

CH: No I'm thinking about the rabbit as well. Rabbits are kind of soft as well and it makes it look kind of fragile in some ways too. I noticed your feet are turned in the way as well is there?

I: Nah I didn't think about it in any symbolic way.

CH: Ok and I love the duck. The duck has a wee cute face and it's kind of looking for attention it seems.

I: Well yeah, always needs attention.

LR: I think it also there is something about this picture that makes me think or feel that the character in there which I suppose represents you looks very tired. Are you tired?

I: I think I'm slowly coming out of it but during the last two and a half years tired is my second name.

LR: Yes, is that because of Covid because you've got a small child?

I: Small child would be the first reason and then because I was so tired with my job and then Covid. Like everything, just together.

LR: I didn't get it quite well when you were speaking about your job. Did you say you worked in sales?

I: Sailing. I was doing social media marketing and stuff for a sailing company.

LR: I see ok. So you're very good with IT.

I: I would say so yeah.

LR: Cool. That's exactly what I'm not good at. I'm really experienced behind the scenes my gosh. My interactions with the social media is really quite problematic.

CH: I'm interested in how your parents, are they living in Latvia?

I: I have dad, but we are not in a very good relationship I would say. We still keep in touch but...

CH: Or your family, how did they cope with Covid?

I: I don't think they coped very well. There are some anti-vaxxers in the family and stuff so communication about that side also is difficult.

LR: You said you wanted to go back because you want to have friends around. So although you have been in this country for quite a long time now because it's over ten years, you still have very close friendships back there.

I: Yeah.

LR: How did you manage that?

I: Very intentionally because every time I go back to Latvia I make sure my closest friends I almost meet them every single time I have time for them and when I lived in London they came to visit us there because obviously when you live in London it's different. You have so many things to explore and they stay at ours. Yeah, so I don't have many but I have good friends and I made sure that they don't disappear.

LR: Yes so is that one of the main reasons why you're thinking about going back. So to be surrounded by your friends.

I: Yeah one of the main reasons. Also because our son, I just want him to stay in an environment where we feel safe in a way and surround him with our friends so at least he has more people that care about him which we can't really provide here.

LR: Ok that's interesting. Can you tell us a little bit more about this feeling about not feeling safe in the UK or Edinburgh perhaps or in Scotland.

I: Nothing like safe safe, but like every kid needs more than just their parents and if we don't have anyone here really then a place there, we see we have friends and they are good people and he can feel safe with them as a small child. Every single person that would become our friend would still be a stranger, even to us, not even mentioning our son.

LR: Yes I understand what your saying. So it sounds like yeah you're at a turning point in your life and it's also interesting that in the other hand this other big thing that happened over the last few years to as Europeans which is Brexit doesn't seem to have really affected you. So how did you feel for example the morning of the 24th of June 2016, when it was clear that the Brexit had won. How did you feel then?

I: I felt sorry for British people because they don't understand there won't be people coming into the country and do all these small things that you don't even realise that they are doing. Well... that's on you guys. [laughing]

LR: Ok, so you didn't think much more on that?

I: No it was just a little bit funny. I still lived in England who in front of me always... yeah I don't want Brexit to happen but secretly I know he voted out.

LR: What a hypocrite!

I: It was just so many funny situations where people tried to hide what they actually think and try not to say something wrong.

LR: Did that change your idea of Britain at all? Did that make you discover on Britain that you didn't know before?

I: Not really because when I realised how the system of like working class and whatever class is going on still, even nowadays that this differentiation between the levels. It blew my mind that its' still

happening, that this difference between people with the money and without the money is so huge that I was always like which category do I belong because I have a higher education, I'm kind of working with the working class people. Where am I if I'm not from here and I do have education, I do a lot of things that maybe better still. So understanding everything is stupid in this sense and then Brexit didn't surprise me.

LR: Wow ok, interesting. So you were expecting that result to a certain extent.

I: Yeah I think so.

LR: ok-kay, alright.

I: I understand from one point obviously those people who voted because it's their country. They don't want many things to happen with the immigration and stuff and if they see only that side obviously they would vote and it's understandable. I don't know if I was in their place if I wouldn't be the same but I am not so if you can't look at one thing from both sides and you see only one then obviously you're going to make the decision.

LR: Do you think the Brexit vote is somehow in line with the fact that British society is a classist society. So you would expect that from a classist society.

I: I think it is to do with that because people voted for the fact that others don't come here and take their jobs. Basically like in the big scale of things I think that was the major reason but they don't see the other sides of that as well.

LR: Which is?

I: Well they help to do these things that you don't want to do and it grows your economy right so.

LR: Sorry Charlie you wanted?

CH: I was interested in the way you said earlier as well that Brexit with the view of good luck with doing these things that all other Europeans are doing this for you. Is that what you were saying yeah?

I: Say that again please?

CH: You said when the referendum happened you felt in your head good luck with all those things us Europeans do for you.

I: Well yeah in a way because it is true that... I as lucky I wasn't working in like factories and stuff. I was sitting in the office, by the computer but I know that many people don't and they do work on the fields, they do work in a hotel, they do so many things and I worked in a hotel when I just moved to the UK. There were maybe only five brits working in the whole hotel and obviously not doing stuff, they were just sitting in the office and doing admin or other things but then being in the hotel environment and seeing. It's different here actually in Edinburgh, here more local people work in a hotel but in London it's a different story. It's just immigrants working and then if you take all these people out, who is going to do that job because the salaries are obviously lower.

LR: Very I can imagine, especially in London it must be tough to survive on a salary like that you know.

I: Yeah and then people are ready to work there because it's better than could be in their country but if you don't see that every day it's easy to ignore it and to think that it's not the case. If you would go I don't know to any factory, I don't think there's many Brits work there.

CH: I... Yeah go on Lucia.

LR: I was going to say that it's really illuminating in away because it's not like, you were surprised by Brexit so in a way you were already kind of disillusioned with this country so that Brexit. Because some of the other European ???? ??. A lot of them say and partly my feeling as well although I haven't been here for so long so I never felt like I am from here. I never really identified myself so much with the UK. I mean I like the UK, I like a lot of things about the UK but it's not like some of my European friends who have spent I don't know thirty years here and for them it's their country. For some of them are saying oh my gosh this was such a blow for me, it was like a punch in the face, I felt rejected and this. So it's much more emotional. For me it's not very emotional because, well if you ask me how do you classify yourself in terms of nationality I don't have any hesitation, I'm Italian. I will always be Italian, I have always been Italian. Just an Italian that has spent a few years in the UK but you are not like these other people I'm talking about. It sounds like even before Brexit you had a more disenchanted relationship with the UK. So Im curious to know why did you come to the UK in the first place?

I: Oh just for fun because it wasn't the situation that oh I need the job now, I need to move. It was just we started dating with my husband now and then his mum was working in the UK and she was like oh maybe you want to come for summer. So we did and then we stayed and it was never a case of, obviously we thought that we were going to stay forever, before the pandemic but then it was just... It was just like easy, it wasn't forced or... it was a choice so that's why I didn't have this feeling about Brexit because it was my choice to come here, it wasn't forced and also I'm not forced to stay if I don't want.

AML: Do you mind if I ask you why you decided to take citizenship?

I: At that time I thought we are going to stay here forever and ever because we liked it and at time in life it felt the right thing to do and also I'm happy I did because at least that gives me an option. Again if after years I think oh you know what, London is great, let's go back. We can do that. It just felt right. Maybe one of the reasons I was thinking because in Latvia there are many Russians and the situation with people who speak in different languages and they live in your country and they don't want to learn your language, that was also one of the reasons well what's stopping you getting citizenship in Latvia. You don't speak in Latvian, why you don't do that. I was basically in the same situation in the UK as Russians in Latvia so why wouldn't I speak in language and why wouldn't I try to get citizenship. It just felt right you know and also yes comparing to Russians in Latvia and knowing the situation, how people feel when someone who with different values and different culture kind of treats your own kind of culture.

LR: So basically you wanted to integrated.

I: Yeah.

LR: Right, I understand.

CH: I mean there's another thing you said Ima which was really interesting as well. You said like you're a university student, you've got your degree and bla bla bla. Do you feel that a lot of people in England or perhaps UK don't acknowledge that people from Europe, working in these jobs are graduates from University?

I: Oh definitely yeah! With my degree I could just (*fart noise -pfft*) go nowhere. I tried to apply when I just moved from the UK. I just graduated, in Cultural sector, with my degree pfft, no one cares. It's just like you don't have any degree at all. Like you don't know anything. At least maybe that was just for me. Maybe I was just... yeah I didn't have experience as well but I didn't really have a chance to get that experience.

AML: Personally it's with me as well Ima. I had a very similar experience you know all those years ago. You know and really had to re-train here. Very snooty. British is best is what I heard.

CH: What's that sorry Anke? British is best?

AML: So I felt it's a very snooty attitude here you know towards non-British qualifications.

CH: OK.

I: It was funny but in my job, we were three people with the same Bachelors degree in Arts, like but in different fields and two of them were British and me. We were talking and like yeah it feels like. We did the same thing, we were studying the same thing but I don't feel like I have that degree in the UK.

CH: That's interesting.

LR: Very. So you think basically Education gathered in other countries is sort of undervalued in the UK.

I: Yeah.

LR: Ok.

(pause as AS is handed her child)

I: Someone will join us!

LR: Oh he's lovely! Hello!

I: He's sleeping. My husband is working in the other room and then he was asleep on him. It's fine so ok where were we?

LR: It was about the undervalue of degrees acquired in other countries. Well yeah I mean, in my experience it's partially like that. I must say that it is part of the academia is not in the UK. Usually the Russel Group universities, if you don't have a British or American PHD it's very hard to become even just a lecturer in one of the Russel Group universities. It's more the post 92' universities are more open to foreigners. I mean I'm a foreigner, my PHD was in Italy and I still got you know a job at a university but I tried sometimes to apply to this more prestigious universities and it's very hard if you don't have a British or an American PHD. You've got to really be an international star to get a job in those universities if you don't have a British or an American PHD so.

I: The examples are like everywhere. I have a friend who, he's from Hungary and he also moved to the UK and then he has, he's a doctor in **???? ????** and he couldn't find a job in the field obviously so he had to take an admin role and no one cared about his degree at all. So he also spent like, maybe eight years in the UK and honestly he was smart and working hard and he worked up the ladder in that company but also after comments started, he moved back to Hungary and now he's working in his field. So yeah, even with a higher degree than just Bachelors you know.

LR: Yes also with a higher degree. It depends on where you got the higher degree yes.

CH: Do you know many people Ima who returned to Latvia?

I: Yeah, most of our friends who we had in London have moved back and from different countries. It's not just in Latvia. Maybe we only have two left and we had quite a few people in London that we called friends and they are all gone.

CH: Ok because we are quite keen to speak to some people who moved back as well. So you might be able to give us some contacts that would be good.

I: I can try yeah.

CH: That would be amazing.

LR: Yeah that would be good. We identify already a couple of people that went back so I'm going to speak to an Italian guy on Thursday. Yeah now that we've done you know this study we've interviewed people who are still here, in some way it would be interesting for us to speak to people who made a different decision and went back and you are somewhere in the middle because you are still here but you are wanting to go back. So do you know when you are going back? Do you have that planned out?

I: It all depends because my husband is looking for a job in Latvia and it has taken so long because obviously you don't want to have the salary that's the average salary in Latvia because it's so much lower but then to get a job with decent salary it's not that easy. He's looking at international company and those vacancies are just not there but then he's trying to negotiate with his job now, maybe to move to Latvia and maybe see from there if it's possible. So it could happen like next month, it could happen I don't know when. Hopefully soon.

LR: Yeah working on it. Alright.

CH: No that's really interesting. By the way you should look an artist called Louise Bourgeois, she was an French artist but your work reminds me of hers. She's quite famous.

I: Oh can you send it to me the name?

CH: Yeah yeah Louise Bourgeois. Yeah sure.

LR: I think there is an optimism as well in your picture, although in General it's quite gloomy. Those bright stars up there, like a lot of glimmers of hope.

I: Yeah I think I've been like, since I left my job I could finally like focus on myself, to understand what I want to do and how I feel and how to feel better and...

LR: You want to work in the arts and culture basically. The cultural sector.

I: I would like to work in print sector. I like all the things that are like you know preparing artwork for prints itself and the technical side with a pinch of creativity. That's what I'm looking for.

CH: Okay cool.

LR: Very interesting, oh well good luck with that.

I: Thank you.

LR: Not ironically, really because it's fascinating. Ok.

AML: Ima can you send us your email you know with your address again in case I don't have it anymore for your voucher.

I: Oh yeah ok sure. I forgot about that.

AML: Just in case you move so you get it quickly.

LR: Yeah that's right.

I: I will ask some friends who have moved if they want to talk to you maybe.

CH: Yeah that would be amazing.

LR: That would be great please yes. That would help thankyou. That would be very interesting for us and we never know you mean we're thinking about another project as well perhaps with people who went back.

I: Call me then!

LR: Yes if you go back to Latvia we'll interview you again! Another nice artwork yes. It's really good actually. The broken heart as well, you're not the only one. You know we had many people before, you know. Drawing broken hearts and yeah. Anyway I think we'll leave you to your lovely boy there.

I: Thank you. It was so lovely to meet you.

CH: Likewise!

LR: It was nice! Yes very nice to speak to you and yes it's fascinating I mean good luck with all your plans.

I: Thank you so much.

CH: OK bye!

End of recording

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