

Interview: Ulli

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Ulli

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

Introduction between CH/LR/U at the start of the recording

CH: What do you do?

U: Well I'm one of these famous home makers, housewives people.

CH: Cool, excellent.

U: It's a long time now. I always thought you know once the kids get to a certain age but they all still live at home even though they are 21, 18 and 16. Well the 16 year old still belongs here, she's still in school of course but yeah I kind of... I studied languages in uni so I've got a masters degree in German and English but when I met my husband I was still at uni but with him with his work as soon as we got together we moved very quickly. He was in Holland, he himself is Scottish, and then from Holland we had short periods here and there and then came to Aberdeen where we had our first baby, he was ten months old when we came here. So I never really had a window where I kind of you know, and you think yeah I'll get back to that but yes.

LR: You're almost Aberdonian now Ulli you've been here quite a long time.

U: Yes I've been here almost twenty years.

CH: You live in Cults then?

U: In Cults yes.

CH: I was in Cults a week ago, and just a small flat just in Cults. Yeah it was really good. I love Cults, it's really nice.

U: Yeah it still has a little bit of this feeling of not being Aberdeen Aberdeen but sort of...

CH: Yeah and I really like, I've not been there for ages, what's the wee village there? The wee community village?

U: Oh Newtondee?

CH: Newtondee that's it yeah.

U: You're talking about Newtondee yes, it's lovely there yes.

LR: Actually on the way back from the university this morning I tried to go to the shop because I saw that there is a sign saying the shop is re-opened and it's opened from 10am to 1pm so I went in with the car and I parked the car but I wasn't sure I could park because there were working men and they were doing a lot of work so I got off the car and I asked one of them is it ok if I park here to go to the shop and he said well actually no because if your car gets damaged and they were moving heavy stuff so I didn't go to the shop. I'm looking forward to going back because they had excellent bread and ...

CH: Oh I love the café there as well. The café is amazing, like they used to make amazing soup.

U: The soup is very special, I don't know how they always get the idea. It's totally out there but it's always delicious.

CH: I do a wee trick though when I go there, when I get soup I take half of one soup and half of another soup and put it on top of each other. It's really nice.

LR: I'm more keen on the cakes.

U: They do do good cakes.

CH: They do really good pizza as well.

LR: Anyway it's been closed for so long I'm really looking forward to going back.

U: It was difficult for them.

LR: So shall we get started? Shall I share my screen?

CH: We have started.

LR: Yes I know we have started but with the image. Hold on. Ok I will start sharing my screen, can you see it?

U: Yeah I can see it.

CH: I think your artwork's amazing. Listen I would be pleased if my students did that.

U: Oh my oh well!

CH: So there you go.

LR: It is, it is amazing.

U: It's not something I've done in a very long time. I was thinking when was I last asked to do anything similar. I mean it sort of brought back memories of school homeworks that the children had to do where you know were involved. Not doing it but you know maybe having a few suggestions or something.

CH: No I think it's really good. It's awesome.

LR: Yeah I think we shall start from you know, you can describe it to us.

U: Yeah well, I was trying to kind of, which I hope is probably, hopefully sort of obvious. There obviously being with family and loved one and sort of lots of countries in two countries that A, well obviously Brexit for me was a total nightmare and still is but also Covid did not exactly improve that or you know made it a lot worse. That feeling of, you know before that I could travel back and forth as often as I wanted, family would come to visit and suddenly that all wasn't possible and you also had the worry of course about having elderly parents and friends and relatives as well. I've got loads and loads of Uncles and Aunties everywhere. Not just in Germany but also Italy and France and yeah, all of them sort of were constantly in the back of your mind and I sometimes felt I'd rather be in Germany, I'd rather be with them and I guess particularly with the whole Brexit rhetoric and that... I mean in Scotland luckily I never really felt that much because mostly I haven't yet met a Scottish Brexiteer. The ones that I know, well, saying that, photo there of my parents in law who I wouldn't say are Brexiteers but I know voted leave which actually has... that really kind of messed up my kind of relationship with them. I hope they don't really know that.

CH: Yeah, which are they in the photograph.

U: Right at the bottom at the right, with the masks. That one that they were showing us that was at the beginning of lockdown and all that and the facemask things and they were talking about yes or no or whatever, we were all wearing them and they got these and I remember they sent us a photo so I kind of thought it's a good photo because it shows A the whole covid issue because of course I was worried about them. Both of them have heart issues and you know. Thinking they obviously would have been particularly affected if they caught Covid. They were very careful and all that but yeah, it was strange as well because they, although as I said they really are lovely, they're really nice people and we got on right from when we first met but the whole Brexit thing has sort of (*inhale of breath through teeth*) you know because they sometimes say things where you go oh for goodness sake and you know I'm not a British citizen, I never want a British citizenship because I thought, you know coming here as an EU citizen, well I'm perfectly happy to be a EU citizen and you know with Britain being part of the EU you kind of though well you're kind of at home aren't you. I remember having discussions with them kind of saying it absolutely makes me feel unwelcome and sort of you know, not really wanted. I'm sure my parents in law never really wanted that at all. For them it's this sort of urgh... yeah... I think lots of older people who would leave have this sort of oh wasn't it all better in the olden days sort of thing and when Britain was a power to be reckoned with and did their own thing and nyah...

CH: Do you talk to them about it?

U: Not really... I mean when it was all happening, if the topic comes to it I to be honest it stresses me out and I just kind of try to totally block it and say well it is what it is now and you know, just have to get on with it. There's no point discussing it anymore. Saying that they've gone very quiet and I think probably because I know a lot of people who wanted Brexit from their point of view for good reasons and realising it's not working out maybe the way they were hoping it would. So I think they are sort of in that group, they kind of think oh actually.

LR: I missed something I think. Are you saying part of your family voted Brexit?

U: Oh yeah just my parents in law yes.

LR: Ohkay.

U: Not the younger ones, it's my parents in law who did and it did surprise me because they're actually very open people. Always, they love to travel, they're very friendly with everybody, they

have absolutely no problems with anyone. They'll meet anyone, chat to anyone but that kind of I thought... well where does that come from, what's that all about but maybe I'll just sensitive. I take it personally which is, I'm not the EU, I'm European but you know and doesn't mean they mean me when they don't like the EU but I go a bit yeah well...

LR: Yeah I know what you mean. So did you ever openly talk with them about it or?

U: Not much like I said when it comes up. I have said things to them like I was always happy to be a European and I'm not interested in having a British passport and I kind of let that window go anyway because if I would have applied I could have dual citizenship and now after Brexit I would have to give up my German passport which I would not do because I know an EU passport is actually a lot better for all sorts of reasons for travelling and so on. Why would I change that.

LR: I actually share a lot of these views. I mean I think, I'm not sure I've not really looked into it. I still think I could get dual citizenship, I could get British citizenship but at the moment I have no intention. I'm quite happy with my Italian European citizenship. Like you say in Scotland we didn't have some of the problems that maybe Europeans in England have had more than us and so I don't know but I think the situation in England is probably worse. So far I haven't looked into it and I don't think I will because I don't think it's necessary and I don't want to.

U: No it shouldn't be necessary you just think surely you know that should be possible if you have lived in country for so long. I mean my husband is British, all my children have dual citizenship. They're all German and British. They all have both passports so you know it's a bit odd. Andrew is the odd one out on the one side, he's the only one who doesn't have a German passport and on the other side I'm the odd one out the only one who doesn't have a British passport.

LR: That's right yes.

CH: Does that mean all your children have German passports yeah?

U: Yes they have because... well the first one was actually born in Germany, because we lived in Holland at the time but the other two were born here in Aberdeen but it's actually very easy if you have a German parent. All you need to do is send the Birth certificate and the marriage certificate to the Berlin registers office and they issue a German birth certificate and from then on you can have German passport and everything. So they are German citizens but I never had to do anything about that. Didn't cost me a penny either which is different from Jeanie the German one that was complicated. He had to go to Glasgow for an interview. He was sixteen and my husband was not allowed to go in with him and he was interviewed almost in a sort of... He was really not happy about it. He said afterwards that they were somehow trying to prove I was someone I wasn't you know, that I was pretending to be this person and I was after this British passport. I just thought has anyone looked at his records, he's lived here since he was 10 months old. He went to school here from beginning to end, he's been in the NHS since then, you know. I just thought that was really unnecessary for a sixteen year old to, you know he's not exactly a baby but he was upset about that. I didn't understand why my husband wasn't allowed to go in with him so really he's a minor.

CH: Yeah 16 year olds is a minor.

U: If he's being interviewed then should not his parents be allowed to be with him?

CH: Yeah.

LR: Is that your oldest son?

U: Yeah.

LR: *When I got James's British passport, because he only had an Italian passport when we came here, and then I got him a British passport but amazingly we could do everything through the post. It did cost us a bit of money but I didn't have to go for this interview so I don't know.*

U: I don't know what they didn't like about him. I'm not sure. I enquired about that, they said no that he had to come for an interview and Glasgow, couldn't do that here so I thought yeah.

LR: *Yes I know one of my friends did that.*

CH: *So did you have to apply for the EU settlement scheme then?*

U: Oh yes I did. Yeah that was fun that. I was kind of like oh for goodness sake.

CH: *What was your feeling about that then?*

U: Oh I didn't like that at all. I genuinely felt a bit... When I came here as an EU citizen you know this country was a part of the EU. I sort of understand that ok if they're not anymore then anyone coming after, leaving the EU would have to apply. That's fair enough but I'm thinking I lived here for nineteen years and you know I've sort of taken part... I've never lived anywhere else in that whole time and you're a part of the community and I just don't understand why they needed all that. Maybe that's my kind of... because in Germany they have a very different system of having to get registered so if you live anywhere you have to be registered and that's how you get your identity card and things like that. Obviously with that not existent here, you as a person don't seem to exist. I mean you're there but your not. Nobody really. I mean the only thing they look at is your gas bill or something like that and that's how you can prove who you are. So it was all a bit bizarre. I had issues with getting the right paperwork because obviously I've never worked so I didn't have any paperwork to sort of say from when to when was I here was I not here so I did try and I thought I'm going to get messages back saying I didn't cover all the years but in the end what did work very well was our mortgage statement. That combined with you know paperwork, they were odd things, anything official, mobile phone paperwork, anything you know. Luckily I've been with O2 for a very long time so I kind of had paperwork for that. Bank statements...

CH: *Did that stress you?*

U: Yeah I found that stressful because I kind of thought, well what about if they turned around again and again no we don't appreciate that that's showing that you genuinely lived here or have a right to be here. I just still find it a bit strange as well because it's not that I just turned up I mean I came here as a spouse of a British citizen and I've got three kids that are all British so how is that such a big issue that I'm not. You know how could it be that they're basically saying well whew we're not so sure about that. You do feel that theoretically they could just turn around and say well no we don't like that, if you could just go home please. You know and you get this moment where you're like you know what, I'm taking my kids and I'm going. It's a... it sounds a bit dramatic but you just go well...

CH: *What did your children feel about that then? Your kids?*

U: They didn't like that either. Obviously they would say you know mum don't stress over it and of course you will get that, there's no reason why not but at the beginning when I'd get it back saying oh no we need more proof and you know we haven't go enough proof from this year to that year or this year to that year and then I had the idea with the mortgage statement. Now luckily we bought a house when we got here and have lived here the whole time so for every single year there's a

mortgage statement and my name is on it and that seemed to be the thing that convinced them that I was here to stay. I don't know why.

CH: That you were genuine.

U: Yeah exactly I'm not just pretending. In a way I just keep thinking are they really thinking that I would turn up here and that I'm that desperate. Always thinking like well I don't need this sort of. Yeah you do feel cheated oddly because you think I've been here for all that time, how about they just look into your. Well I don't know they are allowed to do or not to do and the home office you think they can link your NHS paperwork for example. I obviously registered with the NHS when I first came here. I had two kids and you know you have your regular visits to the doctor so surely they could just look at that and say yeah obviously that person was here the whole time but nah. That just seemed to be too easy.

LR: Did they not accept this NHS registrations as the proof then?

U: Now that was a bit of an odd one. It did say in some of the suggestions of what kind of paper you could submit it did say something about that your GP could sort of give you a piece of paper, some statement saying how long you'd been you know a patient in their practice but when I spoke to our GP practice here they were totally unaware of it and they were not at all able to do that. Again I thought that was a bit odd because I thought why, why can't you write a letter say so and so has been a patient with us from and to and during all the time we've regularly seen her, she's turned up for all her check ups, tests and everything that sorts of comes up.

CH: That's really strange.

U: Yeah well they weren't willing to do that so I thought ok that's one way I can't sort of follow. I had to find a different way of, and I didn't understand it much at all. Maybe I'm hooked up on paperwork but why do they only have you in the computer you know under the settlement scheme. You don't get a piece of paper, there's nothing to show when you come to the border you know they look that up in a computer but what would you do if for whatever reason that doesn't work or you know or the computer is saying no? You could stand there and they say well no sorry can't see you here. They obviously do because I've once come back into the country on my own under the new scheme and the guys sort of looked at my paperwork, then kind of looked at it again and then he said oh you've got settled status here have you and I said yep so that was obviously ok but yeah I just find it all a bit... You do get treated as if you're some sort of suspicious sort of subject and that I don't appreciate. Maybe that's just me being a bit...

LR: No.

CH: How does that play into your kind of feeling of your identity then? What do you feel, do you feel Scottish, British, European or just something else?

U: I've always very much felt European and of course you know...

CH: German or?

U: Yeah, just generally I quite like this idea of, I mean we're not all one country at all, all these countries have their identities and there's all sorts of squabbles and there's all these what nots but I think the overall idea to say that I'm European, that does appeal to me because you know it is still, well the most sort of area a place of people having similar values and ideas. Particularly when you look at political situations all over the globe, particularly what's happening in America and still is and on the other side, China, Russia and so on. I think what we really really need is you know a unit of

countries that have certain standards and certain ideas and that they're willing to sort of you know, fight for, stand for and do that together, and not on their own. That was one of the massive issues with Britain leaving the EU, I thought well what is that going to do for you? Do you really think you're going to have a stronger position in anything, being on your own? It's just... Maybe it's a general idea, one that I quite liked to be within a group and I just like, you know, you're stronger when you're in a group but yeah no. I love Britain, I particularly love Scotland and I love lots of areas in England. I have lots of English friends that I totally adore and I think are fantastic people but when I look at the government in London and lots of the politics that have been made then I get really upset. I just think for goodness sake, they're just going the wrong direction. Put it that way.

LR: Do you think Brexit has changed things in your every day life as well, apart from this of course, feel of a sort of hostile environment which you know when you have to deal with the bureaucracy which makes you feel like you said before, not welcome particularly. Apart from these dealings with the administration do you feel that something has changed in your everyday life because of Brexit?

U: Well it would probably be kind of smallish things. Organizational stuff, of course when you're travelling. So small things really, stupid things, like I basically can't send parcels to Germany anymore because of the new regulations. I don't now Lucia if you have that when you send things to Italy?

LR: I haven't sent anything but I've heard other friends having problems. So what is it like?

U: You have to basically pay back the VAT of any item you send so whatever I send, I mean at the beginning when I hadn't quite worked that out I sent a friend for a fiftieth birthday, I bought her a pandora bracelet. She's my best friend in Germany and you know it was worth so and so much and you have to obviously put that now on your customs declaration and actually I put on less than it was worth because I didn't want her to know how much I had spent on it and still she ended up paying I think thirty euros to be allowed to get the parcel. Basically the postman takes it to you and says right that you are due the VAT on this and now when I'm sending things, because basically they've stepped it up a gear, now those parcels can only be picked up in the post office and you then have to pay your VAT. So even if I send used clothes for my niece and nephew, you know old things of my daughters, little things, we've got old friends an old couple that we're really good friends with and I always sent them Scottish tea because they love it. They now have to go to the post office to pick that up and pay for it. It sounds like such a small thing but you think I would use the post a lot to send little bits and pieces. Every birthday, every whatnot I'd go like, nice something I don't know, something lovely to wear for my little niece or my brother is a big rugby fan so I buy him a rugby top and yeah basically you can't really do that anymore.

LR: That's interesting because I obviously was going to send something up for Christmas although I'm going there. So that's good to know.

U: As long as you mind how much it was worth. You know put on it that was a pound, that was two pound so that you know never mind what it costs so that you can send it.

LR: I suppose it has an impact, I'm not saying on your relationship with the people back in Europe but to a certain extent it does because if you have to declare how much a gift was and you don't really want to do it, it's a gift. You don't want the person to know how much it was so, it is kind of affecting the type of act that you are doing.

U: Oh absolutely yeah and as I said I always enjoyed putting a parcel together. You know I know what sweets they really like and I've got two god children, both just now in November, both were

twenty one and I really wanted to get them something nice but again I've ended up they've both got a one hundred pound amazon voucher because you know instead of me being able to go and buy them something nice and send it A like you said I would have to say that's how much I spent on it and they have to pay about 20% of that so it's...

CH: That's mad.

U: It's a very odd sort of... it certainly totally destroys that and the same with Christmas of course where I would normally have parcels and parcels because I've got yeah loads of family. I would send something to Italy normally as well but that's the same thing now.

LR: Yes because you have relatives there I know I remember it.

U: Yeah that's the gentleman in the upper right corner with the facemask in front of that. That's my eldest cousin and he was the one who was so very ill with Covid. He was the one who was in hospital and was really touch and go for quite a while so that's why he's there.

LR: When was that happening?

U: That was really early on because their somewhere between Milan and Bergamo so they were the first lot so he was really particularly ill last year in spring.

CH: Is that the image in the picture with the stone of "shine on" on it?

U: Yes, yep. That was the photo of him when they said when he was finally back from hospital at home.

LR: I mean he's not very old is he.

U: Yeah he's a bit older than I am, mid 50s and he lost a cousin from the other side of the family, from his fathers side, who's not my side of the family. They lost a cousin and his wife in hospital to covid. At the same time they were in hospital while he was in hospital so they kind of died while he was there. So it was really... I mean I had whatsapp messages every day with my... well she's not his cousin, she's his wife so obviously not directly my cousin but she kept us up to date and some days she didn't hear anything because they were so busy. I mean everybody heard on the news, the hospital there Bergamo, Milan, it was just absolutely mad so you know she had days where she just said I've no idea I haven't heard today. I don't want to phone because you know I feel I keep the doctors from doing what they're trying to do there and that was an awful time because every morning you almost, you would sort of open your phone and think oh, you know how's he doing. How are things specifically after his cousin died and of course you just think oh my god.

CH: Was he on a breathing machine was he?

U: Yes he was yeah.

CH: Why have you put shine on?

U: Because these are those stones, there's another one there. They're sort of connected to the whole lockdown thing. When I was walking the dog every day and all over the woods where I walk the dog these stones were appearing. You know I think in quite a few areas there. There was all these places where they made sort of almost a little mural with them or something like that. These just started appearing in the woods, somewhere in the middle of the wood where I was walking the dog and I started photographing them because I also had a friend here in Scotland who had a bad accident and was in hospital and I was messaging her every day so I photographed everything in the

woods. All the flowers, it was sort of spring you know it was starting to get nice outside and just so I had a photo to send her every day. I basically photographed everything that came my way so those stones were a part of that and when I was looking through my photos I found them all. There's loads of them.

CH: Did you paint one as well, did you do one yourself?

U: No, I have no artistic talent, I was just very impressed with what other people do. Just the sentiment I thought was nice. You know you found those somewhere and you just kind of it would give you a little boost.

LR: I thought the same when I was taking these long walks during the lockdown because there was nothing else to do to get out and I also saw a lot of this stones and this painted stones. They did give you a boost they made you felt a little bit more cheery, they lifted your mood a little bit because the mood.

U: You think there's others out there and they're all going through the same and we're all scared and worried and don't exactly know what's going on so yeah I thought they were very nice actually. I still find some of them, obviously they're still sitting there. You still find some and some of them were so sweet, they were done by children obviously.

LR: I think so yeah.

U: They weren't necessarily artistic but they were just so nice because you could see the sentiment in them. You could see what the kid was trying to say so.

CH: Can I ask you a question, it may seem an odd question but I was kind of interested with your children, did you teach them German or anything like that?

U: Well they all speak a bit of German but not as good as I think I should have taught them. Put it that way. The older ones both speak it much better now and they're actually making a real effort. The oldest one, he was born in Germany and then we lived in Holland when he was very little but we came here before he was a year old but because it was just him and I, we actually did speak a lot of German to start with and he had lots of German picture books and so on and I got a lot less with the others but they all speak Germany so that they can sort of you know. When people talk to them in Germany, as long as it doesn't get very complicated or a very strong dialect or so they can sort of keep up the conversation and understand what's being said. My eldest is studying to become an Engineer and he is doing German here because he'd like to work in Germany at some point. He might also do some post grad studying in Germany. The middle one he just started uni, he's doing computing but Aberdeen Uni also asks for the students to do some extra courses so he's studying German there which is actually really good because he learns the grammar.

CH: So was that important to you that they kind of learnt German?

U: Yeah it's funny. In a way I think it is important that they are able to communicate at least a little bit but the thing is though that my phone family speaks English very well, including my parents. So even my parents do speak English to the children. I always say please please don't do that and then lots of family there, they actually enjoy being able to use their English because English is the first language that you would learn in Germany so lots of people, most people speak it passably. Some better than others, some you know depending on how long you take it as a course in school. So it is actually people quite like being able to speak English so for the kids it's always been easy you know everybody understands enough English for you to get along. So it's not easy to teach them the

necessity necessarily but I think the older they get the more they enjoy being able to do it. While when they were very little it was the opposite. If I spoke German to them they would be a bit like mum! You know small children don't like to stand out and they don't like to...so they were a bit like come on you can speak English so please do. Don't you know, thinking about other kids and other parents. I don't know Lucia if you would have had that with James if he was a bit like oh mum, tch, don't be silly.

LR: Yeah well I think in James's case it was the opposite because we were living in Italy when he was small, he just wanted to...

U: Oh yeah I forgot! Sorry.

LR: And Duncan was speaking to him in English and he didn't want to speak English and when we came to Scotland he was already about twelve and I thought. I realised he knew some English but I didn't know how much he actually knew. It was like a big question mark and then I was a bit worried because I was thinking now he has to go to school and I wonder if he will understand everything but in reality it took him just a couple of weeks to just activate the English that he already knew because he had been exposed to it but he just didn't want to talk English when we were in Italy because like you say, kids don't like to stand out and they don't want to do something that is not necessary for them. When you are in a country they just want to speak that language and now paradoxically sometimes the opposite happens. So now he's away from home and he's always with friends and he doesn't live with us anymore and so sometimes when I text him in Italian he answers in English and he's almost telling me look I just want to speak English because it's now easier for me. So it's very weird I must say, because for me instinctively I speak to him in Italian.

U: That's nice though because I would normally speak English with my kids. Me myself and I have to say look Ulli it's important for them if they actually want to learn it properly, just talk to them in German. If they don't understand something they can always ask and the thing is they do understand so much more than I probably think they do. When I try to explain sometime they go oh yeah I know that mum! You know they'll be like for goodness sake mother!

LR: Yeah I think because I came here a lot later and because my son really was already twelve. I think he's really half and half and I'm still seventy five percent Italian and twenty five percent I feel because when I came here I was already quite mature lets say. I wasn't a young woman or anything. I mean I had been to England in the 90's and I had lived there for a few years but I think most of my life has been in Italy and there's no way denying it. I feel very much the same as you about Brexit and about this kind of heavy environment or kind of hostility that I perceive not so much in the people I interact with but when you have to deal with the administrations and plus like you. I was going to ask you maybe if you wanted to elaborate a little bit on it, when you said that you have to deal with people you knew voted for Brexit. I was, how does that affect you? Does that affect you a little bit, the relationship that you? Because I have a few quote, unquote friends or acquaintances that I know have voted Brexit and I feel a bit hmm!

U: It's a really strange one because I try to tell myself for goodness sake it's a political thing, it's got nothing to do with you personally but I find it very hard and I don't know... yeah... It's... My parents in law and then I've got a brother in law, not my husbands brother but the husband of his sister and although he's a nice enough guy and he's English... But he talks some nonsense. Like he very very clearly doesn't follow the whole political thing and in the news he doesn't read a paper or whatever. You have the feeling all these kinds of knowledge comes from I don't know reading the headlines in

the daily telegraph or the daily mirror and you know he will say these idiotic things where you just think well no that's not true. I get quite... I will say you know that's not true and you know and I actually now, that's maybe partly that statistic that's in there. It's just one that because I found it as a photograph. I must have taken a screenshot of it but I became totally obsessed during the lockdown and particular the sort of pandemic. Not the start but maybe the first year or so. I became quite obsessed with statistics and numbers and all that because I like to know. I wanted to know everything.

LR: Actually in the picture as well there is a symbol of it in the little statistics that you included.

U: Yes which was just one of the ones that kind of, you know, it's not specifically important what the statistics are about. It's about the map. Although it obviously shows that you know that lots of the European countries have you know a much better prepared health service for a situation like that where you might end up with a lot of people in intensive care. I guess that always winds me up as well, although I totally admire the NHS as such as an idea and I have so many friends and nurses working in the NHS and I absolutely appreciate everything they do but this sort of... what you want to call it this worship of the NHS as something that you're never allowed to say anything negative about? Well that doesn't make sense because any institution that size, that does so much will have something negative about it and it's no good talking around it and pretending it's all sweetness and light when we all know how hard it often is for people to you know get seen and get the care that they need. So I got a little bit during this whole clap for carers and protect the NHS, I always thought we shouldn't talk about protecting an institution. We're protecting lives. Everybody's and not just, you know but because it's just a big thing in people's minds that the NHS is a beautiful being. Sorry, it gets me a bit and I'm always thinking well in the end it is just like a massive businesses and you do pay for it. It doesn't say in your payslip that that money went there but obviously you pay tax and I mean I know how much tax we pay and obviously goes there. You can't be...

CH: Do you think it's something to do with being British or anything like that?

U: The worship of the NHS?

CH: Yeah.

U: It certainly has but I think like my husband who is British and has not lived away from Britain that long during his whole life. He still says well obviously we are very grateful that it's there and the idea that everybody has access to healthcare is fantastic and it should be like that but he said that doesn't blind me to the problems. That's the issue I think, when someone tries to suggest something has to change and this isn't working, it becomes this sort of issue as well you being, you know, if you don't like the NHS or think there's something wrong with it in the sense of it being as it is, it is not like that but it's just... I don't know.

LR: It's not, actually I totally share this and I don't know if you saw it but a couple of weeks ago or three weeks ago there was dispatch on channel four that was all about the NHS and they were exactly saying this that the NHS is almost like a sacred thing in Britain and even the simple idea of saying something negative about the NHS is completely penalised or ostracised. Like something you can't do, like almost a blasphemy you know.

U: That's what I feel it is.

LR: Something so sacred that you cannot dare to say anything negative about it so it's exactly what you were saying and coming to this conclusion that there is this kind of worship across Britain. There is this kind of worship about the NHS and again I wonder how generationally it is

because for example in my family, sometimes I kind of witness this discussions between Duncan and his mum because his mum is one of them that you cannot say anything against the NHS. Who is the doctor? The Doctor said this and when Duncan says something to make her understand that sometimes you are allowed to challenge the doctor, then she gets a little bit upset like you said something blasphemous because you have criticized the NHS. So yeah I don't know if it's very British, it could be, that's a good question actually.

U: When at the time, when the situation was at it's worst and the health service was under such pressure I didn't quite understand this whole idea of everybody had to draw pictures and everybody had to go out and applause and all that. As I said I have so many friends who are Doctors and Nurses and every single one is doing the most wonderful job and I totally appreciate that but that almost covers up that they don't get treated very well. I mean that my friend as a nurse has to go through and you know the kind of treatment, the long hours she works, every single shift she works longer than she should have and it's already a 12 hours shift. She's under so much pressure every single day so it did not help her that people were applauding at their doorsteps. What would help, what would be better funding, more nurses being trained and sort of actual actions. It's no good to sort of pretend, we love you so much therefore everything is fine.

LR: Yeah you're right.

CH: For your picture. I mean I think your picture is amazing. It comes across as very kind of countryside and looks kind of relaxed and elements of it do anyway.

U: Yeah maybe a little bit because nature was very much the place to be wasn't it when it was sort of all kicking off and it's still the place where I'm happiest and calmest and eh... It's also... which is not necessarily recognisable straight away. The photos at the top, that's Germany and my home and in the bottom right corner that is walking in the highlands with my kids there. I mean lockdown and the in the whole sort of first place, walking I thought was the one thing that sort of take your mind off things, even anything that either happened not just personally and Covid but it was my mum had a stroke last November. It was of course when I could you know, I couldn't have travelled to Germany even if I wanted to. I think if she would have died I probably have been allowed to but apart from that there wasn't a way and luckily she recovered very quickly and is doing absolutely fine but that was such a moment where you just felt, I shouldn't be here I should be you know at home so to speak. Which I will still say. I will stay I should be at home although I've now lived twenty years here but obviously as soon as it affects your direct family and your mum and dad it's all a bit like, yeah I want to go home. Sort of that photo that I've cut in two there, that's us all at my parents house. On the one side I happened to be on that day, on the left hand side that was my family sitting on the right hand side is my parents and my brother and family. Obviously we would see each other so often normally, at least three times a year we went to Germany and they come here regularly so that was something that as well totally stopped and we really really missed each other. Also my kids really missed their cousins and my grandad it was sort of... that's why I cut that in the middle because it just sort of you know, the way we were so split.

LR: I was going to ask you, you mentioned that during those days in the lockdowns you became kind of obsessed with statistics. Why do you think that was?

U: Well I think it was very strongly, you know how when you can't control something. You somehow give yourself the illusion of control by knowing as much as possible about it so I kind of read every single article. I read the British news, I read the BBC, I read the Guardian web page every day and read CNN and I read the German main news online and I must have gotten on my family's nerves

enormously by constantly you know saying to them oh in so and so they're doing that and here and there the numbers are like that. You know it was just a constant sort of looking for something. Then of course the whole development of the vaccines was being discussed. I knew all the what nots about that and as I was saying again I was probably getting on everybody's nerves. Well my husband would say, you're a control freak you couldn't control and that really bothered you and that might be a bit true because my husband says I am a little bit controlling. I think he's right to a certain degree. I'm one that hates flying and again my husband says you hate flying because there's nothing you can do about it. You sit there, you know I can drive a car and that's ok I know what's going on but being in a situation when I'm totally powerless to do anything about it. That doesn't sit easy.

LR: Do you think this looking at statistics and numbers, ok it might have responded to your need to control things but do you think it had any other role in your emotional situation then?

U: Well I don't know. It was probably not actually the healthiest thing to do. On one hand you have information which is a good thing but on the other hand too much information could also be a problem. Sorry I just need to quickly see to my daughter that I'm not available. Ok, can you just speak to her then. Sorry one of my sons was supposed to pick his sister up from school and the other has taken the car so now nobody's picking her up so she's phoning and phoning like what's happening!

LR: Hopefully pick her up now finally.

U: Yeah she'll be fine she can walk home. She said she had a headache this morning and I said it's ok I'll pick you up and then I thought no I can't and then one of your brothers can but the other one has vanished with the car because he didn't know.

LR: Make himself useful.

U: Yeah.

CH: Ulli I really love the way that you spoke about cutting things together and in your collage you kind of like, how you like integrated things together like you kind of cut like wee kind of peak bits out. It's kind of interesting. Is that you in the top left hand corner?

U: Yes.

CH: And your other half is at the bottom.

U: Yes exactly. That's sort of me split between the two sort of worlds or whatever you want to call that I suppose. That I guess worked for the pandemic and the whole Brexit situation has more given me that split feeling but like I described earlier the split feeling of that I should be in Germany, I should be with my family there but obviously having my family, particularly my kids and my daughter wasn't doing that well actually last summer. The first summer with the lockdown and all that, she became mentally really stressed out and we ended up at a psychologist for her. I think for her it was all too much. While I was doing to feel that I was in control which was reading the news and you know, knowing everything about it, for her it was the opposite. She kind of found it extremely frightening. The whole concept of that there was this virus out there and you mustn't do this and you can't do that and you know don't kill your granny by hugging her and things like that. She started not sleeping well and becoming really really odd and remote obviously then they weren't allowed to see their friends or go to school. That was a big thing for her because school was her main sort of social scene. Although she gets on really well with her brothers. Yeah that was really difficult that time because to be honest I couldn't have left her behind here, even if I would have

been allowed to travel but at the same time I felt I shouldn't really have my family in Germany on their own so to speak.

CH: So your collages are all about being split in different ways is it?

U: Yeah yeah I think that's sort of it. You feel torn, because at one hand obviously after living in a country for that long and I love Scotland, I love the Scottish people. I'm very happy to live here but I guess particularly since Brexit and with the pandemic I thought well you know sometimes in your head it goes this sort of well if I was at home, if I was in Germany, if I was in Europe you know what would be different? Would that be better and it's not at all that I would say oh I want to move away, not at all but the feeling is certainly that, yeah I feel less settled. More sort of a bit, yeah I maybe would move if I could. My husband actually often talks about retiring to Germany or buying something in Germany that we would actually have properties here and there and could maybe you know spend our retirement there or here depending on I dunno, which is not a bad idea I suppose but that would feel, in a way quite, for me should be exactly the right thing. It would sort of split me between the two countries, I feel split between anyway but on the other hand I don't know. It depends I suppose on what your kids do because I think as a parent, no matter how grown up your children are in the end you always feel you don't want to be too far away from them if you can.

LR: Yes and I suppose that even in this plan making I suppose Brexit might have a role because...

U: Oh absolutely yeah.

LR: Because I mean your husband has British citizenship and not European and you have European citizenship and not British. I wonder how easy it will be, even if somebody wanted to retire in both places, how easy it would be to go from one to the other and I don't know.

U: Yeah you're right you'd have to sort of work out how long would I have to live here or there to sort of you know. I mean in a way it might not be a bad thing that I'm technically German and he's technically British because it kind of means both of us have a foothold on either side so to speak. Also I have spoken to people in Germany. It happens to be a friend of my brothers works for the registry office so to speak so I was asking him how easy or difficult it would be for my husband to get German citizenship but he said it wouldn't be difficult at all. As soon as we bought a property there and we'd lived there for a certain amount of the year, it would only take a few years then he could very easily get German citizenship because I'm German and he's married to me. So they still have a slightly easier way into the country I think than it might be the other way around here where you know it doesn't really seem to matter that I'm the spouse of a British citizens. That doesn't really make a difference.

CH: One thing I notice in your picture as well is that food seems to be important.

U: Food?

CH: Yeah.

U: Oh I see yeah, that's a big meal there.

CH: No but twice over yeah.

U: Oh I mean no definitely. I suppose yeah. Obviously you know you get your certain foods that you like or that you particularly miss if you're not somewhere and it all at the same time obviously it's something that connects people, eating together. I cook all the time and during lockdown I went a bit ballistic I think as in planning ahead exactly, which I normally don't because I'm not good at

planning, so it became this thing. I got a whiteboard in the kitchen where every morning I would write down what was going to be for dinner and yeah... I certainly, one of the things with the parcels from here to there not being that easy because I do send certain foods to Germany and they send me other things back or usually with our very frequent visits to Germany, normally there's all this stuff that comes home with us and the other way around and I'll bring when I'm going there which of course has been sort of disconnected. I guess that's not the most important thing. It can be the little things sometimes you miss when you think away yeah. I guess because it is a piece of home, certain foods you know remind you of your childhood and from there they become a comfort food don't they.

LR: And I understand that, for example in Germany there are some very specific food for Christmas that make Christmas really more like Christmas. So I was wondering do you get them here this winter?

U: Oh yes actually. I don't know if you've been to Lidl recently, but I mean Lidl have basically every Germany Christmas, at least baking item, you know anything sweet, they have.

LR: Ok, you can find it here still.

U: Yes most things I can yeah. I mean Lidl's put out, I mean it's all the sort of ginger bread covered in chocolate and then the sort of spiced biscuits. They are very similar to Biscoff, they are now very popular because it's this sort of Northern border, Dutch, Belgian sort of biscuit. So certain spice, they have all those and they have all that. Actually I was in Lidl yesterday, bought two big boxes of chocolate ginger bread so I'm prepared to go. Although I mean we are set to go to Germany for Christmas and that would be the first visit. Well for everybody else the first visit in two years while I was in Germany this summer for a short visit.

LR: Just on your own not with family?

U: No just on my own because at that point the kids vaccinations weren't quite long enough ago because double vaccinated you can get into Germany without a test even but because the boys had theirs quite late and Josephine the youngest she had only had one so there was no chance for her to come in and they would have had to quarantine without the double vaccinations so that wasn't worth doing. So I just flew down for a week on my own which was much better than nothing of course. It was really nice, I got to see lots of the family. I actually saw lots of the Italian family because, slightly complicated, my best friend since we were babies actually, German friend. She's married to my Italian cousin. So when there is a bigger family event, and this was the confirmation of their youngest child. They've got four, so then obviously they live in Germany, my friend and my Italian cousin but the Italian family will come and be at the party when there's a big event so that was really nice because I did see quite a lot of the Italian family. Well there's lots of them, I didn't quite see half but it was still quite a few because it's a big family.

LR: So it was the first time going back since after the lockdowns? This summer?

U: No actually I was home last summer for a while. Very similar had flown over. Andrew he's the only one who hasn't been at all in the two years and specifically Christmas for the kids it's a really really big deal going to Germany for Christmas so I just hope it works out because at the moment they're struggling with high numbers which they're not much higher than here really but here it's been a constant. While there they were very very low actually and now suddenly it's all gone a bit eek.

LR: I just said to Duncan in Italy as well numbers are going up. I'm also booked to go and I hope I will be able to go but they're going out there and I said to Duncan yes in Europe they're having the forth wave. Here we just have a big tsunami since July, it never stopped so.

U: I guess you could say that yes. It was a bit like that and I think in a way that's the problem now because Germany all together had so few, if you want to call it that, infections over the two years that there's a lot of people still with you know they haven't had it although almost 70% are vaccinated but we all know you can still catch it even if hopefully you won't be getting that ill but that obviously the numbers will still go places. So it's yeah... a little bit we'll see fingers crossed. At least I had my parents and my brother and family here in September/October so I did see them all so I'm kind of not... well it would be awful if we couldn't go because I know the kids would really not be happy but at least we've seen them all. The kind of main players. It's not really everybody because obviously there's so many other that got quite a big family and they're spread all over Germany as well and there's lots we haven't seen for two years. Well at least the sort of core family we had here so that was great.

LR: So can I ask where is the sea? Is this the sea scenes, are they in the UK.

U: Yes they are actually. I was just was looking for a photo of myself. It's Portmahomack which is a lovely we place that we've been to a couple of times. It's up north near (Brorah) when you... Not North North it's just sort of Moray course and you go past Inverness, Black Isle and then sort of then that's when the whole thing turns I would say up. My husband would say north. It all goes North there and on the coast there Portmahomack lies on sort of slip of land and it's a lovely wee place. We really like it there and they've got some nice holiday homes there and it's got a lovely beach and we went there last summer for a summer holiday because obviously the... We were planning to go to Italy, we had it all booked, to Venice, to the lake and everywhere but instead of that we went to Portmahomack which was nice too and it was.

LR: Next time, next time you go to Venice.

U/someone in background talking.

U: Dog caring he needs to know if he needs to take the dog out.

LR: Of course.

CH: Can I just ask one more question.

U: Yes.

CH: Re your picture, when you were putting it together, what were you trying to create or did it just come together as you did it or did you have an idea beforehand?

U: Yes I guess I did have an idea in the sense of ... Yeah because that feeling of just having this kind of well I don't fully belong here nor there sort of you know you're a little bit without your home. I just thought you can not really, totally show that in a picture but I thought this way of splitting it in the two halves and sort of splitting myself in the two halves sort of many shows that a bit.

CH: OK, no that's interesting. Cool.

LR: It does, the first thing I noticed when I got your picture is this kind of crack. It's a crack in the middle isn't it?

U: Yes exactly. I guess it is a little bit of a broken relationship with Britain. That sounds stupid but there you go.

LR: At the same time it's a cracked picture but it still stays together.

U: Yes.

LR: The two halves are communicating because for example the picture of you it's really split in two but you can still put it together in your head so yeah.

U: Yeah I tried to sort of not just cut it just like that but I thought it's easier repaired if it has things that slot into each other.

LR: Exactly.

U: Like this you know, rather than just have a cut like that.

LR: Is like a jigsaw. It's really good.

U: Yeah exactly. Put the halves back together.

CH: Did your family say anything about it?

U: My daughter, she's probably the most artistic and yeah no she thought it was good. She kind of you know, she's critical so I must have done something right. I don't think my husband has looked at it much because he would probably say oh I don't understand what you're trying to say. I wouldn't want to kind of say to him that's exactly either because that would feel slightly you know. It's not his sort of you know. I don't want to give him the feeling that I'm totally this horrendously torn person. You know I'm happy enough but I would certainly say you know I've been more settled than at the moment but...

LR: Ok.

U: With the settled status...

CH: One thing I was going to say to you Ulli because we would like to show the picture it might be a good thing to do some wee, would you be able to do some wee scribbles on top of the faces?

U: Yeah I had said that to Lucia when I first photographed it that I said to her I assume you know it would be easier if I could sort of. I mean I tried to get people not that recognisable but I thought if I knew them I would still recognise them.

CH: Yeah maybe just a black felt pen.

U: Yes.

CH: You could just draw smiley faces or something on top of them.

U: Ok yes I'll think about it but nothing too dramatic looking I could just stick something over their eyes.

CH: Yeah you could, just put a dot on top of them or something.

LR: It's not a problem because as I said at the moment it's only me and Charlie seeing this picture but because at the end we want to do a kind of book, an online book with all the different artworks, then it would be you know better.

U: I totally understand that and when I was putting it together I thought that and I thought ok they're wearing masks but they're a bit you know.

CH: No but I think your picture's amazing.

LR: Yeah I know and I think that by putting these things to hide the faces it would make it less beautiful to a certain extent but I wonder whether technically Charlie there would be other ways of maybe fading a little bit the faces instead of putting a black thing on it?

CH: Yeah or we could print one out and I could do something with it and I would ask you Ulli if your happy with that.

U: Yeah absolutely I was thinking a big colour copy and then sort of blur about the faces with a little bit of something or so, yeah.

LR: Yeah blur yes exactly, there might be things, technically on the computer that you can use to sort of blur the faces so that...

U: Yeah you sometimes see it with photos online don't you where certain people who are part of the photo should not be recognised and their faces become just a little bit of a blur yeah I see what you mean.

CH: Yeah we might be able to. I'll ask someone to do it for me because I'm not really technical like that I'm afraid.

U: Oh I sympathise very heavily.

LR: I can ask you know the IT expert in our school Laura. She's really lovely and helpful. I can ask her if she can use photoshop to sort of blur.

U: Yeah that would be great.

LR: Because I think if you put something black on it I think it ruins a little bit the image. You can be too rough whereas I think if you blur the face a little bit so that they're not recognisable anymore. I think it will look better because it's a little bit of a shame. It's such a great picture, such a great collage. I don't want to ruin it from the aesthetics point of view.

U: Yeah.

CH: I love the colour in it, it's great colour.

LR: What is it, is it like a graffiti or mural behind your Italian cousin?

U: No that is, don't ask me, the photos taken in the (???) hotel restaurant near Milan and this is the massive mural that they have in one of the rooms where they have weddings. They often work with artists. I do have more of the photo. I can send you that Lucia and then you can see because you might recognise what it is. It's a lot going on there because his son is on the photo and I thought well he shouldn't be in the picture but there is a lot more of that picture.

LR: It looks really nice the background.

CH: Yeah it's beautiful.

U: They have some gorgeous rooms there. It's an old hunting lodge but it's massive and they have very very big rooms and they've always had this thing about artists. The hotel belonged to my uncle

and auntie before and they always had some. Some of the art, a bit you know, different but always impressive and very sort of powerful, strong.

LR: Yes, well last question just to make sure I understand this one on the top right corner is the German place where you're coming from Ulli?

U: Yes it's the village next to where I'm from but these houses these (hatimer?) houses they're extremely typical for the whole area so that's sort of you know what totally looking at that, well for me that's home. It's also the town, well village, where my husband and I got married. We visit that every time we're in Germany. The kids as well, you know every summer that we're there, that's one chit that we always have to do. Always go there, go to a café and there's a good place for ice-cream so it's sort in a way a place that symbolises.

CH: No that's so beautiful. A beautiful place my goodness. It looks like the kind of thing you'd see on a box of chocolates.

LR: A fairytale.

U: It's a very cute little village but right next to this is an old monastery with an old chapel, that's where we got married so it is very picturesque. The river there, that river is very close to my parents house so when I was little that's where I walked, well not quite every day but we almost always had a dog so yep, dog walks there, the sort of standard thing. Now we have a dog since we are married we have a dog, so whenever we're visiting so basically every day we're there. The kids swim there in the summer so yeah again it's a sort of place with a lot of meaning.

CH: Yeah I love the wee window, that wee tiny square window at the bottom.

U: Yes you wonder, what sort of little corner room that would have been. It's actually a water mill that whole building so where that little roof is there towards the middle, underneath there is an old waterwheel that still works. Don't ask me what it's doing but the thing is still churning and it actually be an actual mill.

CH: Oh that's amazing!

LR: Oh well, I think that's great. I'm really happy with the interview, I don't know about you Charlie?

U: Yeah please just and if you think of anything please just get in touch. I talk a lot I know I'm terrible.

CH: No no it's really nice to speak to you Ulli, thank you so much.

LR: We'll let you know about this change.

U: Do you think it would help to have the original then I can drop that off with you.

LR: Yeah perhaps.

U: That might be useful. It's really really large so it's an A3 poster because I thought otherwise the photos would have gotten too small so it's a little bit of a poster size but it might be easier to work from the original.

LR: I don't know because the artbook is going to be online.

CH: Yeah that actually, I think that might be a good idea because then you'll get a good copy of it.

LR: Ok yeah Ulli we can arrange that, I can pick it up or you can drop it off here, whatever is more convenient.

U: Yeah either or is fine.

CH: Thank you!

LR: Thank you very much and I also be in touch Ulli, that's what we can do. I'll be in touch to give you the £20 Amazon voucher that we give to all participants.

U: I don't need that Lucia! There's more worthy a cause you can give that too.

CH: No no everyone has to get it.

LR: We do that with all the participants so when I drop that off I can pick up the collage.

U: Yes I meant to ask as well, the art pack, there was so many lovely things there but obviously all I needed was a glue stick so is that something that you would have somewhere to give to otherwise I'll ask for the playgroup or something.

CH: Give it to your daughter?

LR: Is your daughter not?

U: Yeah maybe, she's a bit old maybe although she does do stuff like that. I'll ask her. She certainly still does...

LR: That's fine with us and if she doesn't need it you can maybe give it to charity I don't know.

U: Yes my boys, they're actually at somebody cares every Wednesday. So I could put it in a nice sort of thingie, so they could see what it is and they could take that with them. They might be able to hand that out there.

LR: We don't need it back, no problem. So I'll be in touch for these two things.

U: Yes that's fine.

CH/LR/U: Bye!

End of recording

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